



W. B. YEATS'S DRAMATIC THEORY AND PRACTICE

ABSTRACT

THESIS SUBMITTED FOR THE DEGREE OF

Doctor of Philosophy

IN

ENGLISH

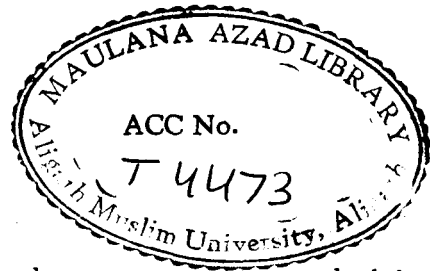
BY

RASHMI ATTRI

**Under the Supervision of
PROFESSOR K. S. MISRA**

**DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
ALIGARH MUSLIM UNIVERSITY
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A B S T R A C T



W.B. Yeats has been adequately studied as a poet and his plays, too, have drawn considerable critical attention. He wrote a considerable amount of critical essays pertaining to drama, though, except for one essay, "The Tragic Theatre," he did not write any formal critical treatise on drama. Yeats has not been included as a critic in critical anthologies. The reason for this is that Yeats's critical pronouncements are not addressed to any group of dramatists or forms of drama practised by others. They are, in fact, his thinking aloud of what he himself wanted to achieve as a dramatist. Hence there is a case for exploring to what extent Yeats has followed his own critical credo and with what results. Such a study, seriously thought about and comprehensively executed, is not yet available. Hence the need for undertaking the present investigation.

Yeats from the very beginning of his dramatic career has put on himself a limitation of writing plays which may serve the cause of nationalism in Ireland. He was one of the leading pioneers of the Irish Dramatic Movement which was an offshoot of the general Irish Literary Renaissance in the latter half of the 19th century. The Irish Literary Movement itself professedly aimed at serving the cause

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of the National Movement for Independence. Thus the subject matter which was favoured was to be the glorious Irish past and its heroic sagas. The themes, therefore, were to be geared to the contemporary patriotic ethos of Ireland. The result of this line of literary artist's thinking was Yeats's first two Cathleen plays. Though Yeats continued to guide, conduct and even dominate affairs at the Abbey, he drifted away from the type of literary tendency which would inevitably lead to naturalistic plays. Yeats was a romanticist and had great fascination for the remote and the mysterious with a strong strain of mysticism and the philosophic. Like his early escapist poetry, he now wrote plays dealing with the remote reality of life. The two plays, The Land of Heart's Desire and The Shadowy Waters are the product of this anti-naturalistic thinking of Yeats as a playwright. Such plays have a built-in potential for sentimentalism and what Yeats called a womanish introspection with which he got fed up soon. The reason for writing the first two realistic plays in symbolic garb and the subsequent other two plays, dealing with the world of no-where, are contained in Yeats's critical pronouncements. Yeats thus achieved what he wanted to achieve in these plays. But he subsequently changed his critical stance and veered in the direction of writing abstract and symbolic plays. That he would move in

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this direction was even hinted at in his early four plays where symbolism and abstraction are predominately present. Cathleen, the fairy child, and the poet lover are all symbolic figures whose habitations also are symbolical. Flesh and blood characterisation has been done away with in favour of emotionalism and sentimentalism.

The next stage in Yeats's dramatic theory is when he was anxiously trying to forge a dramatic technique which might respond to his desire to write symbolic, and abstract plays which could produce the effect of intellectual excitement along with emotional appeal. It was during this period that Yeats wrote his essay on "The Tragic Theatre" which contains his views on the tragic form of drama which he considered to be the best form of dramatic composition. Yeats now would only touch the fringe of reality here and there but would write about remote themes drawn from the distant past. He would sacrifice individualised, rounded characters on the altar of achieving a balanced, unified effect in drama resulting from the harmonious blending of songs, rhythm, music and dance. He was in favour of a drama in the form of musical composition where the importance of the constituents is submerged into the emergence of a unified effect. This notion of drama combined with Yeats's philosophical preoccupation and

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mystical inclinations made his job as a dramatist rather difficult. At this stage his contact with the Noh plays of Japan proved decisive. Yeats thought that the Japanese Noh technique would answer his creative aspirations. And the result was his Four Plays for Dancers. By trying to yoke an alien technique to native Irish material Yeats could only hope to espouse failure.

After the Four Plays for Dancers which, of necessity, Yeats was obliged to put on a drawing-room stage because these plays were meant for élites primarily-- he realised that the element of characterisation and solidity of plot were to be paid attention if mystical or philosophical reason was to be conveyed in a pleasurable manner. His plays written after this modified critical stance are the plays which make interesting reading though they have not been popularly staged.

Thus the present study attempts to show that Yeats all his life has been critically thinking about what drama, especially poetic drama, should be like which he would like to write. Having followed his critical inclinations Yeats wrote plays in different dramatic conventions. Each experiment with a dramatic convention gave him an insight into the inadequacies of either his critical theorising or

his dramatic practice. The conclusion of the study therefore is that whether Yeats likes it or not drama in order to succeed has to be a popular form of entertainment and its success can only be determined with reference to its viability on the stage. However, Yeats's experiments showed the path for the other pioneers of the revival of poetic drama in the twentieth century, who could follow the right direction in their search for the suitable medium and the forging of a new convention which may not necessarily reject the existing native traditions of drama. Yeats's preference for idea at the cost of human elements in drama, which is another major factor contributing to his failure as a popular dramatist, should be a lesson to be learnt by the future practitioners of this form.



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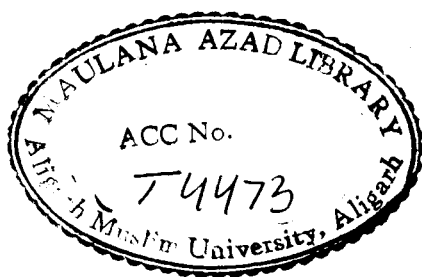
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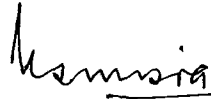


ALIGARH MUSLIM UNIVERSITY
ALIGARH-202 002 INDIA

26 December, 1992

To Whom It May Concern

Certified that Miss Rashmi Attri completed her Ph.D.
dissertation, entitled "W.B. Yeats's Dramatic Theory and
Practice," under my supervision and that the work is
done, to the best of my knowledge, by the scholar herself.


(Professor K. S. Misra) 26/12/92
Supervisor

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P R E F A C E

W.B. Yeats has universally been acknowledged as a great major poet. Hence a lot of work on the various aspects of his poetry has been done. A number of detailed studies on his plays are also available. However, when we talk of literary criticism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries Yeats's name as a critic does not figure. The reason for this is that Yeats's literary theorizing is primarily concerned with his own efforts at evolving a suitable dramatic mode for his plays. This is why Yeats as a critic normally does not figure in the critical anthologies. Yeats has not written any systematic formal critical treatise except an essay on "The Tragic Theatre." His critical statements are scattered in a number of short essays, interviews and production notes to his plays as well as in his comments on the plays of other dramatists, which were put up at the Abbey during the period he was at the helm of its affairs. Any proper appraisal of Yeats's plays in the light of his own theory of drama has not yet been done in any serious analysis of Yeats's plays to determine to what extent he succeeded or failed because of his own critical stance. We have tried to establish that where Yeats ignored human concerns and leaned heavily on an alien technique, his plays have been far from being successful, both theatrically and artistically.

The study is divided into two broad sections. The first comprises an Introductory Chapter which, besides stating Yeats's place in the Irish Dramatic Movement, explicates his critical points of view. The second part consisting of Chapters II to V contains an analysis of Yeats's plays in chronological order with the help of the theoretical framework provided by Yeats himself. The final Chapter on conclusion sums up the general points emerging from the analysis of the plays. Finally a select bibliography has been appended.

I wish to acknowledge my gratitude to my Supervisor Professor K.S. Misra, Department of English, A.M.U., Aligarh, for his ungrudging help and guidance in the preparation of the present study. I must thank Professor Azizuddin Tariq, Chairman, Department of English, A.M.U., Aligarh, for his encouragement and assistance. My thanks are due to all my teachers for their constant encouragement. I also wish to thank the members of the staff of Maulana Azad Library, A.M.U., Aligarh, and Seminar Library, Department of English, A.M.U., Aligarh, for their cooperation and assistance.

My profound gratitude is due to my parents but for

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Rashmi attri

[RASHMI ATTRI]

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CHAPTER I

I N T R O D U C T I O N

W.B. Yeats was a pioneer in the establishment of the Abbey Theatre. Naturally, therefore, he tried to follow, at least in his two Cathleen plays, the manifesto of the Irish-Dramatic Movement which was an offshoot of the Irish-Literary Renaissance. This Literary Renaissance itself was an integral part of the general movement for freedom from the British rule. Drama, being the most effective medium of reawakening nationalism among the people, received considerable attention from its pioneers, like Yeats, Lady Gregory, Browne, Synge and Russell. This manifesto regarding its subject matter is succinctly stated by Yeats as follows:

John Synge, I and Augusta Gregory, thought
All that we did, all that we said or sang
Must come from the contact with the soil
... we three alone in modern times had brought
Everything down to that sole test again
Dreaming of noble and beggarman.¹

The Irish playwrights were expected to write plays dealing either with contemporary life of Ireland or with its rich legendary and historical past. While dramatists like Synge

1. Peter Allt and R.K. Alspach, eds., The Variorum Edition of the Poems of W.B. Yeats (New York: Macmillan Company Ltd., 1959), p.603.

chose Irish peasantry for their dramatic material,² Yeats found Irish legends and myths as a rich mine of source-material and thus declared that "from the great candle of the past we must all light our little tapers."³ Lady Gregory also drew upon the Irish folk-lore and legends, and used the actual speech idiom of the people. After the formal establishment of the Abbey, Yeats's interest in realistic plays started to drift in a different direction. Of all the Irish dramatists, Yeats is the only one who wrote about what drama should be like and thus gave us a body of ideas through his letters, conversations, and formal essays, which constitute Yeats's theory of drama.

W.B. Yeats's formal theories began somewhere around 1903 or so. His views on the various aspects of drama point to his intention of achieving what he later called 'total theatre.' Because of this, discussions of the conventional elements of drama, such as plot, characterization, function, etc., were either relegated into the background or completely ignored. Instead, Yeats attached great importance

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2. See Synge's 'Preface' to The Playboy of the Western World in Ann Seddlemeyer, ed., Synge's Collected Works, Vol. II (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), p.4, and Synge's 'letter to Stephen Mackenna', January 1904, in D.E.S. Maxwell's Modern Irish Drama 1891-1980 (London: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p.33.
 3. Horace Reynolds, ed., Yeats's Letters to the New Island (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1934), p.158.

to the dramatic experience which the audience draw not from detached observation of the play but by an intellectual participation in all that happens on the stage. This assertion of Yeats was not "a change of mind about his own work so much as a desire to free himself from what he conceived to be the Abbey's obligation to a popular, objective theatre."⁴ For the sake of clarity and convenience we propose to describe Yeats's views under the following heads: subject-matter; character; the verbal medium; song; dance and music; acting and stage; and function of drama.

Subject-Matter:

Regarding the subject-matter for his plays Yeats followed the manifesto of the Irish Dramatic Movement. Unlike Synge and O'Casey he was not interested in the contemporary life, urban or rural. Rather he preferred to go back to the remote past of legend and folklore which he rightly thought more relevant to the contemporary life of people in Ireland. The rich cultural heritage of the heroic legendary past was considered more conducive to the re-awakening of the Irish consciousness to its earlier greatness than the clinical presentation of contemporary

4. Peter, Ure, (London : Oliver and Boyd, 1963, p.9.

life. This material was to be exploited in a manner in which it could acquire universal dimensions. It is only then that it can qualify to be called great literature. In this process, Yeats asserts, poetic imagination plays a primary role as compared with observation which can render the desired reality only naturalistically. It is a well-known fact that Yeats was against Zolaesque and Ibsenian naturalism and the type of realistic themes which were being presented in Commercial Theatres in England and on the Continent during his time. The world of the legends, it is needless to say, offers a fertile soil for imagination to work on. In Yeats's words these myths and legends were both "far from the discussions of our own interests and the immediate circumstances of our life."⁵ Yeats believed that remoteness lends charm to the life presented in drama and hence appeals to the audience more effectively than the actual reality around us. Myths and legends would create a world that will transcend topicality and temporality.⁶ Yeats did this because, like Synge, he believed in the fecundity of Irish people's imagination.⁷ But this is not to say that the world of contemporary reality was to be completely neglected.

5. W.B. Yeats, Essays and Introductions (London: Macmillan, 1961), p.285.

6. W.B. Yeats, Autobiographies (London: Macmillan, 1961), pp. 193-4.

7. W.B. Yeats, Essays (London: Macmillan, 1924), p.74.

The legendary stories were to be exploited in such a way that they would have relevance to the immediate life.

Thus Yeats laid stress not on the surface reality -- all that can be 'touched, measured, explained, understood' -- but on the inner-reality, the "invisible life."⁸ The reality that he would depict was to be like that of Synge's who in Yeats's own words "tells of realities, but he knows that art has never taken more than its symbols from anything that the eye can see or the hand measure."⁹ According to Yeats "the world of reality is not altogether rejected, it is but touched here and there and into the places we have left empty we summon up rhythm, balance, pattern, images that remind us of the vast passions."¹⁰ For Yeats, a dramatist should speak not by observation but through experiences. He should lay bare not what he has observed but what he has experienced, and "must make his work a part of his own journey towards beauty and truth."¹¹

Character :

Yeats's views on characters were based on his opposition to naturalism in drama. He rejected

8. W.B. Yeats, Essays and Introductions, p.195.

9. Ibid., p.304.

10. Ibid., p.243.

11. Ibid., p.207.

representative characters used in the realistic plays of Ibsen and Zola. In the realistic plays of his time characters were topical and well rounded personalities. Yeats in his art of characterisation seems to be in line with Edgar Allan-Poe who created characters that were "bizarre and an image of our secret thoughts."¹² Yeats believed that characters in drama were not to be identifiable persons of real life. They were to be the pure creations of the artist's own mind capable of presenting a vision that he intends to create. Characters, therefore, need not possess earthly endowments, because they derive their life from "some dreamy drug."¹³

Like the plays of Maeterlink, a Yeatsian play was to have not people as we see around us but personae "as faint as a breath upon a looking glass."¹⁴ Both considered characters just as symbols. Here E.E. Stoll comments that Yeats was following both Longinus and Aristotle.¹⁵ This was so because Yeats aimed at a "play that will be more a ritual than a play, and leave upon the mind an impression like that of tapestry where the forms

12. W.B. Yeats, Explorations (London: Macmillan, 1962), p.144.

13. Ibid., pp. 144-9.

14. W.B. Yeats, Essays and Introductions, p.334.

15. E.E. Stoll, Shakespeare and Other Masters (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1969), p.86.

only half reveal themselves and the shadowy folds."¹⁶

In his essay, "The Tragic Theatre," Yeats claims that characters belong to comedy only: in tragedy we have motives and passions in place of characters. He supports his argument with example drawn from the dramatic practitioners of ancient Greece, Rome, and France. According to him tragedy is defined as "passions alone." Tragedy, in Yeats's view, rejects characters and takes its form from "wandering passion."¹⁷ Like Aristotle, who subordinates characters to plot, Yeats subordinates them to passions. He seems to be influenced by the Elizabethan dramatists who created "beings who made the people of this world seem shadows."¹⁸ In support of his argument Yeats quotes Goethe as saying: "we do the people of history the honour of naming after them the creations of our own mind."¹⁹

Here one point worth-considering is that Yeats distinguishes between characters and personalities. Personality, according to him is beyond local circumstances i.e., "some one place, some one moment of time."²⁰ So,

16. W.B. Yeats, Essays and Introductions, p.370.

17. W.B. Yeats, Explorations, pp. 144-9.

18. W.B. Yeats, Essays and Introductions, p.196.

19. W.B. Yeats, Explorations, pp.144-9.

20. W.B. Yeats, "The Theatre of Beauty," in Harper's Weekly, LV, November 11, 1911, p.220.

unlike a character, personality has no particularities. Character has local habitation. It is the individuation of abstraction. Yeats, making it further clear, says that Juliet has personality while her nurse has character; and that "I look upon personality as the individual form of our passions."²¹ In drama Yeats wants personality, abstraction and not rounded characters which grow and develop in the context of time, place, environment, etc.

Yeats believes in the shadowy figures that exist in our mind not as individuated personalities but as ideas in the manner of Maeterlink, who presented on the stage 'faint souls,' "naked or pathetic shadows."²² In fact Yeats has been misunderstood by a number of critics. They have criticised him for presenting characters without flesh and blood and for conceiving them in abstract and symbolic forms. As we stated above, this was not a lapse on Yeats's part but a deliberate dramaturgical strategy adopted by him. Such a preference for faint souls and shadowy figures was in keeping with his theory of tragedy aiming at "the drowning and breaking of the dykes that separate man from man, and it is upon these dykes that comedy keeps house."²³ Yeats believed that with the breaking of the dykes characters shed

21. W.B. Yeats, Essays and Introductions, p.190.

22. Ibid., p.241.

23. Allan Wade, ed., W.B. Yeats: Letters (London: Rupert Hart Davis, 1954), pp.54-8.

away their individuated personality and eventually disappear. Yeats, however, asserted that characters are not to be found in the type of tragedies he wanted to write. There they are replaced by passions. Yeats goes on to argue: "Did not even Balzac, who looked at the world so often with similar eyes, find it necessary to deny characters to his great ladies and young lovers, that he might give them passion."²⁴ Yeats further argues in favour of his point of view by reminding us that originally tragedy was just a chorus, where characterisation in the conventional sense was dispensed with.

Yeats's preference of these shadowy figures to the well-rounded personalities of realistic plays had one more reason. According to him, drama was supposed to engage a man entirely emotionally as well as intellectually at the same time. According to him when art "was struck out of personality, there was little separation between the holy and the common things."²⁵ Yeats's ambition was to present before the audience the "essential moments of a man who would be exciting in the market or at the dispensary door."²⁶ This was so, because Yeats wished that the audience, when they leave the theatre should have the same

24. W.B. Yeats, Autobiographies, p.502.

25. W.B. Yeats, Essays and Introductions, p.295.

26. Ibid., p.365.

energy, as they had before their entrance into it. So, he says that tragedy is the art of flood and it gives new images to the dreams of youth. Comedy, he says, is totally opposed to this art of flood. This "can create innumerable personalities, but in each of these capacity for passion has been sacrificed to some habit of body or mind."²⁷ Yeats considers character as these habits of mind and body, while personality as an energy. So tragic personages, by which he means personalities, are not the personifications of averages. Yeats wants the tragic characters, like those of Shakespeare's and Synge's, to emerge from the soul of an artist, and not founded or determined and shaped by external things. In this way, the spectator sees in a tragic character an image of his own soul and mind.

The Verbal Medium :

Yeats's views on the verbal medium in drama are in keeping with his views on subject-matter. Yeats believed that for living drama, language should also be living. By living language he meant a language that had escaped contamination by the cheap press and newspapers. According to Ellis-Fermor this language meant "a language of Irish speaking people of the West, when they translated their

27. W.B. Yeats, Autobiographies, p.502.

syntax and imagery into English."²⁸ It is true that Yeats preferred English to the native Gaelic language as a means of expression. In the sweep of general National Movement for Freedom there was a strong voice in favour of the revival of Gaelic and its use in literature. But Synge had amply shown that Anglo-Irish, re-created with English syntax and vocabulary combined with Gaelic, was the most effective medium of expression in drama. It is well known that Yeats did not have any adequate command of the Gaelic language. He did not follow Synge in forging a new poetic idiom. Rather he decided to express himself both in poetry and drama in modern verse. However, he could not keep himself aloof from the Irishness of the English language used mostly in the west of Ireland. He declared "that the idiom of the Irish thinking people of the west... is the only good English spoken by any large number of Irish people today, and we must found good literature on a living language."²⁹ So what Yeats aimed at was a hibernicised English that had resulted from its long intercourse with Gaelic. He sought the dialect used in the west and the south of Ireland, because it was "an ancient form of the English language."³⁰

28. Una-Ellis-Fermor, The Irish Dramatic Movement (London: Methuen, 1939), p.68.

29. W.B. Yeats, Plays and Controversies (London: Macmillan and Co., 1923), pp.29-31.

30. W.B. Yeats, Uncollected Prose, 1, ed., John P. Frayne (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), p.467.

It was a combination of Irish syntax and Tudor English. Yeats's preference for the living language, in fact, meant the colloquial language of daily use. About this common speech he once wrote to Dorothy Walllesley, "you have the animation of the spoken words and spoken syntax. You have the best language among us because you most completely follow Aristotle's advice to write like common people."³¹

Yeats preferred to use occasional prosaic words in order to create the impression of an "active man speaking."³² For this he needed hard and bare language like that of a "Saga."³³ Yeats's conclusion was that modern poetry of his time lacked natural rhythm which leads to "over-childish or over-pretty or over-feminical element."³⁴ Yeats sought this natural rhythm and rejected the childish or feminical element. What he eventually aimed at was a "musical caressing English, which never goes far from the idioms of country-people."³⁵

The second significant aspect of Yeats's views on language was his dislike for artificial, over-elaborated

31. W.B. Yeats, Letters, ed., p.846.

32. W.B. Yeats, Autobiographies, p.434.

33. Ibid., p.381.

34. W.B. Yeats, Letters, p.710.

35. Ibid., p.354.

speech of the realistic plays of his own time. For him artificiality in language spoiled the expressive beauty of the medium. When the characters of those realistic plays spoke, it seemed to him as if they were scientific inventions and not human beings. He even announced that "the element of strength in poetic language is common idiom, just as the element of strength in poetic construction is common passion."³⁶ Though Yeats wanted natural, everyday speech, yet, like Wordsworth, he did not want each and every word taken from the actual speech of people. Yeats rather liked vivid and passionate words, believing that "what the ever-moving delicately moulded flesh is to the human beauty, vivid musical words are to passion."³⁷ He, in fact, wanted that the words should be restored to their ancient sovereignty. Like Wordsworth, Yeats concluded that a living and vivid language can be found in the idiom of the poor. Thus, he felt attracted towards the recitation of Florence Farr. He also wanted to "clear out of poetry every phrase written for the eye, bringing all back to the syntax for the ear alone."³⁸ But Yeats did not want his characters to recite in a monotonous chant, and did not even like the

36. W.B. Yeats, Plays and Controversies, p.47.

37. Ibid., p.12.

38. W.B. Yeats, Ideas of Good and Evil (London: R and R Clark Limited, 1896-1903), p.14.

broken and the prosaic speech of ordinary recitation. He wanted more chanting than speaking and singing so that music does not dominate the speech. Thus what he aimed at was the half-psaltery and the half-lyrical, because for him speech was a nodal point in drama, that lays bare the soul. In the speech of Florence Farr Yeats discovered "for the first time, that in the performance of all drama that depends for its effects upon beauty of language, poetical culture may be important than professional experience."³⁹

Since language for Yeats was the means to express personality, he considered it necessary for the actor to "understand how to discriminate cadence from cadence, and so to cherish musical lineaments of verse or prose that he delights the ear with a continually varied music."⁴⁰

Song, Dance and Music :

Yeats regards music as an important element of drama. He talks of music as well as of musical words. According to him music lends lyricism which is an integral component of dramatic speech in a poetic play. According to him music helps a dramatist in creating the desired atmosphere and mood of a play. Yeats believed that though the musicians

39. W.B. Yeats, Autobiographies, 1, 149.

40. W.B. Yeats, Plays and Controversies, p.47.

from time to time have attached some significance to the speech but their main concern has always been music.⁴¹ Closely related to music is the element of song. The function of song may be both narrative and for creating mood. This Yeats found most successfully used in the Japanese Noh plays. Songs also evoke emotions which the dramatist intends. They may also sometimes lighten the tension created by the story in the mind of the audience. Yeats further realised that a playwright's message cannot be conveyed effectively through the verbal medium only. It should also have gestures and bodily movement which we find in a dance drama and in the Noh-plays. His views about dance have been best explained by the Old Man in The Death of Cuchulain, who says: "I promise a dance, I wanted a dance because where there are no words there is less to spoil."⁴² This dancing figure in Yeats's plays can be a source of blending movement and stillness, and intellect and body simultaneously. To Yeats this dancing figure was to be like the symbol best explained by him in the last stanza of "Among School Children."⁴³

41. W.B. Yeats, Letters, p.374.

42. W.B. Yeats, Collected Plays (London: Macmillan and Co., 1952), p.694.

43. For details see, Frank Kermode, The Romantic Image (London: Macmillan, 1957), Chap. IV and see Gorden and Fletcher, eds., Images of a Poet (London: Macmillan, 1961), pp.120-23.

Acting and Stage :

Opposed to the over-decorated stage of the realistic plays of Ibsen and Zola type, then in vogue, Yeats sought a simple stage. Yeats decided to get rid of all the painted lights and gaudy decorations. His belief was that all this hinders the free play of the audience's mind. What he sought was "something very startling and strange, the beauty of the moving figures."⁴⁴ In one of his letters to the editor of The Daily Chronicle, Yeats wrote "I see in my imagination a stage where there shall be both scenery and costumes, but scenery and costumes which will draw little attention to themselves and cost little money."⁴⁵ According to him, stage techniques of modern plays totally ruin the imaginative response to the play. They disturb the imagination by what he called "stark anachronism."⁴⁶ Yeats was opposed to this and favoured a scenery that stirs the audience's intellect and imagination simultaneously. Yeats thus goes to the extent of having just a shadowy background, a "vague pattern of a vague form upon a dim background."⁴⁷ He wanted to get the severe beauty of "Egyptian

44. W.B. Yeats, Uncollected Prose, 1, p. 383.

45. Ibid., p.250.

46. Ibid.

47. Ibid.

wall painting of pictures."⁴⁸ According to him the stage-setting of naturalistic plays was a trade and not an art, and calls it "fleshy landscape painting."⁴⁹ He desired just a simple decorative scene painting which "would mingle with the tones of the voices and with the sentiments of the plays, without overwhelming them under an alien interest."⁵⁰

Yeats also liked to have symbolic scenery like the Egyptian paintings, and like the Japanese art, in which "an interior will be exactly represented; but an exterior is only suggested. For instance, the Japanese will represent the sea by surrounding not only the stage but the auditorium with a well-known Japanese wave-pattern."⁵¹ He considered this device especially useful and effective for a poetic play. For example, Yeats says that if we have to present a forest on the stage, then, we should represent it by means of a "forest pattern" and not by "forest painting."⁵² It was both cheap and novel. This surely required the use of imaginative power on the part of the spectator. He says, if a writer portrays a

48. Ibid.

49. Ibid.

50. W.B. Yeats, Letters to the New Island, p. 501.

51. W.B. Yeats, Uncollected Prose, 1, p.401.

52. W.B. Yeats, Letters, p.280.

wood, then it is not his task to impress upon our minds that the wood is a real one, for "the imagination will do that far better."⁵³ His stage has no place for realistic details. Like the ancient dramatists he wrote for a theatre that was half-platform and half-stage. According to him, a scenery with garlish colour is an art of fading humanity. So a background should be like the background of a portrait, where only single colour is enough to suggest a wood or mountain. For him scenery should have a make-believe, and it should be nothing more than "that work house dormitory, where a few flowers and a few coloured colourpanes and the colour parts had made a severe appropriate beauty."⁵⁴

All this led Yeats towards the stage decorations of Gordon Craig. In 1902 he wrote thus "Mr. Gordon Craig has discovered how to decorate a play with severe, beautiful, simple effects of colour that leave the imagination free to follow all the suggestions of the play."⁵⁵ He calls Mr. Craig's art 'new and distinct art', something Yeats found in the Elizabethan stage also. Thus he decided to build his theatre in the same shape. Yeats desired a stage whose space would dictate the proper means

53. W.B. Yeats, Uncollected Prose, 1, p.293.

54. W.B. Yeats, Explorations, p.88.

55. W.B. Yeats, Letters to The New Island, p.31.

of filling it "as the decorator of pottery accepts the roundness of a bowl or jug-- a true art because peculiar to the stage."⁵⁶

Here it is relevant to have a cursory glance at the rather paradoxical nature of Yeats's stand in regard to theatre. As a pioneer of the Irish Dramatic Movement his professed aim was to reach as large an audience as possible. This would have meant his support to the commercial theatre in offering to the audience of mixed intellectual calibre and sensibility what they would like to have on the stage. As we have mentioned earlier Yeats's opposition to commercial theatre must have unconsciously guided him in the opposite direction of artistic theatre which would give intellectual entertainment. Secondly, Yeats had a passion both in poetry and drama for experimenting with new techniques. His was a restless, creative mind, never satisfied with following a single track either in theme or in technique. Besides these, there were other reasons for his growing disgust with large audiences and formally constructed and conventionally equipped theatres. When his Countess Cathleen was performed the Puritanical Catholics had protested against it on the ground that a human's selling his or her soul to the devil for whatever cause was a blasphemy. Yeats realised that it was the ignorance of the Irish audience who failed to see

56. W.B. Yeats, Explorations, p.178.

the symbolic meaning in Countess Cathleen. Since Yeats essentially was a poet and an ardent admirer of the Symbolist Movement in poetry he rightly believed that profundity of meaning and high suggestiveness in styles can be most effectively achieved through symbols. The second instance was the riotous behaviour of the Irish audience at the performance of Synge's The Playboy of the Western World where the audience criticised Synge's use of the word 'Shift' and in his allowing in the play a stranger's staying alone with an unmarried young Irish girl in a shabbeen. Similar and equally violent behaviour of the Irish audience was seen at the performance of O'Casey's The Plough and the Stars, where the protest was against the use of an Irish character as a prostitute and allowing soldiers to carry the freedom fighters' national flag into a pub.

Since Yeats rejected the conventions of naturalistic drama in theme, plot and characterisation and verse, his conception of acting on the stage was also different from the prevalent notions and practices. In a 'slice of life' play, acting by characters as people behaved in real life was necessary. But since Yeats wanted the totality of effect thought a combined function of stage setting, character, language, song, dance, and symbolism, acting was to be greatly controlled in the direction of simplicity as well as stylization. His main

aim was to "get rid of irrelevant movements as soon as possible,"⁵⁷ as for him such irrelevant movements overpowered the bodily movement. They become, wrote Yeats, "less impressive, more declamatory and less intimate."⁵⁸ Yeats replaced them by 'the nobler movement' of the body by which he means "the rhythmical movement."⁵⁹ Yeats believed that acting of realistic play type would drift our attention away and disrupt the continuity of the nobler moments. So he preferred less movements and more stillness.

Yeats was against the fidgety business of the professional actors and sought the dream-like movements of the French actors, and the stillness of the amateurs, the reason being that they used lesser movements. He thus announced that: "the actors must move for the most part, slowly and quietly, and not very much and there should be something in their movements decorative and rhythmical as if they were paintings on the Frieze."⁶⁰ What Yeats desired was something similar to imaginative acting. Hence he tried to revive the old play-acting, by which he wanted to find "grave and decorative gestures such as delighted Rossetti

57. W.B. Yeats, Ideas of Good and Evil, p.14.

58. W.B. Yeats, Essays and Introductions, p.527.

59. W.B. Yeats, Plays and Controversies, p.48.

60. Ibid., pp. 132-3.

and Modox Brown."⁶¹ We see here the influence of Mrs. Patrick Campbell's acting, which Yeats thought perfect, and declared that "I said to myself this is exactly what I am trying to do in writing, to express myself without waste, without emphasis."⁶² He wanted to achieve perfect self-possession and precision that was to be so absolute that "the slightest inflation of voice -- plucks the heart."⁶³ Yeats was in favour of subordinating speech to acting, just as he sought the subordination of music to speech. According to him a play is a "bundle of acting parts."⁶⁴ It should, therefore, have something for the actors. This shows Yeats's liking for a simple, precise acting. He wished to revive the old art of statue-making opposed to the modern art of picture-making that discourages the participation of the audience. In a letter to Frank Fay, he wrote "the great thing in literature, above all in drama, is rhythm and movements."⁶⁵

Function :

For Yeats the aim of drama was not to achieve the catharsis of emotions as was with Aristotle. He called this

61. W.B. Yeats, Essays and Introductions, p.170.

62. W.B. Yeats, Letters to The New Island, p.360.

63. Ibid.

64. Ibid., p.658.

65. W.B. Yeats, Letters, p.466.

catharsis the climax of the excitement of nerves. What he desired was the climax of that unearthly excitement that contains in it the wisdom for fruit. This climax, for Yeats, is that very moment when we transcend our daily life and give it a new meaning. His definition of tragedy makes this point clear. He says "the tragic art, the drowner of the dykes, the confunder of understanding moves us by setting on to reverie, by alluring us almost to the intensity of trance."⁶⁶ Yeats in his support refers to the ancient dramatists like Racine, Corneille, etc. They, to quote Yeats's words, attempted "a continuous exaltation of the animation of common life (so) that thought remains lofty and language rich."⁶⁷ Yeats's belief was that at this moment of climax man seems to be confronting with the tragic truths of life. This elevation caused by this climax is Wisdom sucked out of the tragic realities of life. In the Yeatsian play climax occurs when the hero transcending his limits overrides his external failure and is reconciled with his spiritual identity. At this very moment pain converts into joy. Yeats once declared that "the arts are all the bridal chambers of joy. No tragedy is legitimate unless it leads some great characters to his final joy."⁶⁸ This accords

66. W.B. Yeats, Essays and Introductions, p.239.

67. Ibid., p.242.

68. W.B. Yeats, Explorations, pp.488-9.

with the Neitzchean concept according to which "even the ugly and discordant are an aesthetic game which the will in its utter exuberance plays with itself."⁶⁹ For Yeats the end of an art is peace, which reminds us of Buddhist aesthetics. Indeed, the drowning of the dykes suggests not turbulence but immersion and subsequent calm. Here we are reminded of Sanskrit poetics, according to which "the last end of poetry and drama does not lie in their logic but in the beatitude."⁷⁰

For this type of verse-play which like a poem was to be short enough to establish character and situations, the one-act form was the most suitable. It is in conformity with his statement that "I must not only describe events but those patterns into which they fall."⁷¹ It was opposed to the then prevalent realistic five-act plays, and was in accordance with Yeats's plan of having relatively cheaper productions of plays. In this context Frank O'Connor says that in the initial years of the century "any one who became friendly with Yeats was liable to break out in one-act plays."⁷² It was the urgent need of those times when the

69. Rene Wellek's A History of Modern Criticism (London: Jonathan Cape, 1966), IV, 341.

70. J. Shipley ed., The Dictionary of World Literature (New York: The Philosophical Library, N.D.), p. 321.

71. W.B. Yeats, Autobiographies, p.330.

72. See Frank O'Connor 'A Classic One-Act Play' The Radio Times, 5-11 Jan., 1947.

Abbey Theatre was in its infancy and could have a single set and allow limited characters on the stage. A small stage with the potential of single act has its own advantages, for example "if anything goes wrong one discovers it at once and either puts it right or starts on a new theme, and no bones are broken."⁷³ This naturally makes one-act plays popular. We can trace its development through Yeats's entire career as a dramatist. It began as an after-piece, later on came out as curtain raiser and finally developed into a one-act form. For example, The Land of the Heart's Desire appeared as a curtain-raiser, The Dreaming of the Bones as an after-piece and eventually The Death of Cuchulain came as Yeats's ideal one-act form. Here Yeats seems to go back to the avante-garde art theatre movement. In fact all his plays are written in one-act form. Naturally they are short but not weak in structure and thematic solidity. According to A. Parkin, "their rich texture is a major achievement. It derives from his mastery of language, which manages to give depth and weight to his dialogue."⁷⁴

Yeats's experiment with dramatic form and technique led him to the Japanese Noh Plays whose influence upon his dramatic theory and practice has been of crucial

73. W.B.Yeats Letters, p. 408.

74. Andrew Parkin, The Dramatic Imagination of Yeats (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan Ltd., 1978). p.65.

significance for him as a dramatist. It is relevant, therefore, to briefly summarize the significant characteristics of this art form which Yeats admired and tried to put in practice in his own playwriting. After 1912 or 13 Yeats realised that his theory of drama emerging gradually out of his own life-long experiments could not be satisfactorily fulfilled through symbolism and abstraction. He got attracted to the Japanese Noh play for a new technique. The story about his radical turning towards the Noh play under Ezra Pound's influence has been described by Yeats himself in his letter to Lady Gregory, in "A People's Theatre" (1919) and by other writers. His inclination towards the Noh plays is, in fact, an extension of his own theory of drama. Indeed as early as 1899 he sought a theatre "for ourselves and our friends"⁷⁵ that was free from all the demands of commercial theatre, and which restored the words to their ancient sovereignty over gesture, memory and scenery, thus made drama ritualistic.

In 1903 his essay, "The Reform of Theatre," expressed his views of reforming a theatre in its speaking, acting, scenery and making the play serviceable both to the demands of beauty and truth, and to make theatre a place of

75. W.B. Yeats, Essays and Introductions, p.166.

intellectual excitement. The language, too, was to be beautiful as well as appropriate, gestures just as an accompaniment of speech not its rival, acting was to be simple, scenery and costume, like a portrait, were to contribute to its total effect.⁷⁶ His next essay, "The First Principle" (1904), further elaborates these views and talks of drama as a moment of intense life, an activity of the soul of character, an energy, and eddy of life purified from all but itself.⁷⁷ This concept of drama is presented in his Deirdre and in On Baile's Strand, where the total effect is a single unified impression of all the varied elements of drama such as song, music, character and image, like that of a flame which is the main element of Noh plays. Then in 1910 his essay, "The Tragic Theatre," he openly declared his inclination for a drama where character grows less and even disappears, only to be replaced by the lyric intensity of image, pattern, rhythm, etc.⁷⁸ This essay also reveals Yeats's concept of tragedy as the drowning and breaking of dykes that separate man from man, a passionate art where persons on the stage greatness till they are humanity itself. But it was only in 1913 when he met Ezra Pound that this dramatic theory of his found a proper channel. Ezra Pound

76. W.B. Yeats, Essays, p.107.

77. Ibid., pp.153-4.

78. W.B. Yeats, Essays and Introductions, p.238.

introduced him to the Japanese Noh-drama. He now announced: "I have invented a form of drama, distinguished, indirect, and symbolic, and having no need of mob or press to pay its way -- an aristocratic form."⁷⁹ Rajan calls these elements as "notable premonitions of a Theatre which Fenollosa characterises by its 'concentration', by its union of costume, motion, verse and drama to produce 'a single clarified impression'."⁸⁰ Yeats too wishfully visualized it as combining the best qualities of Aeschylus and Walter Pater.

The main characteristics of the Noh plays which fascinated Yeats were its compressed, inexpensive form, consisting of just one or two simple scenes, its acting, dialogue and scenery which were also simple and natural, its highly suggestive and symbolic nature, its dynamic diction, the use of chorus, mask and dance, besides its highly religious, mysterious and lyrical qualities. The effect that he required in his earlier plays and attempted by verbal means but in vain, is achieved in his plays based on this Noh-pattern. Here dance consists of a series of positions and movements, as for a Japanese dancer "the interest lies not in the human form but in the rhythm to

79. Ibid., p.221.

80. B. Rajan, W.B. Yeats: A Critical Introduction (London: Hutchinson & Co., Ltd., 1965), p.95.

which it moves, and the triumph of their art is not to express the rhythm in its intensity... for deep feeling is expressed by a movement of the whole body."⁸¹ A dancing figure in the supreme moments serves to unite movement and stillness and to blend the intellect and the body. Besides mask, the main element of the Noh helped him to attain what he called 'a distance from life,' for he opined that ritual of passion and intensity of being are best expressed by keeping "an appropriate distance from life."⁸² Again its indirectness and symbolic features enabled him to incorporate archetypal myths in his plays.⁸³ Ghosts and spirits quite often used in the Noh plays gave Yeats an opening for exploiting his interest in occultism. Again, the point of crisis, which occurs when a character, who had appeared to be an ordinary mortal, suddenly turns out to be a God or spirit, also fascinated Yeats. Yeats towards the end of his "Introductions to Ezra Pound's Certain Noble Plays of Japan" wrote: "It pleases me that I am working for my own country, perhaps some day a play of mine in the form I am adopting for European purposes may excite, once more, whether in the Gaelic or in English under the slop of slieve-na-mon or Craugh Patrick, an ancient memory."⁸⁴ Its

81. W.B. Yeats, Essays and Introductions, pp.226-231.

82. W.B. Yeats, Four Plays for Dancers (London: Macmillan 1921), p.87.

84. Ibid., p.236.

mysterious, religious and lyrical qualities conformed to his own wish of reviving such a dramatic art as would include 'a mysterious theatre', with a style indirect and sacred like "a memory or prophecy, subtle and lyrical like that of Shakespeare's and an audience like a secret society."⁸⁵

Besides, its unity of different elements coincided with his own attempt to give each play "a self-subsistent image that would recede from us into a more powerful life, the deep of mind, the anima-mundi."⁸⁶ The Noh play's feature of getting the audience participate in it, also conformed to his own plan "to show events and not merely tell of them... and I seem to myself most alive at the moment when a room full of people share one lofty emotion."⁸⁷ The use of Mask in the Noh plays was again very fascinating to Yeats. The concept how the poet and the mask-maker worked together in order to create some grotesque and heroic types pleased him, as these fixed types, "keeping always an appropriate distance from life, would seem images of those profound emotions that exist only in solitude and in silence."⁸⁸ Yeats has already developed his own theory of

85. W.B. Yeats, Plays and Controversies, pp.207, 213, 418.

86. W.B. Yeats, Essays and Introductions, pp. 224-5.

87. Quoted in B. Rajan's, W.B. Yeats: A Critical Introduction, p.96.

88. W.B. Yeats, Plays and Controversies, p.417.

mask and in support of it, he says, "our system of divesting the actor's face of a mask, on which the many expressions appropriate to his dramatic character might be moulded into one permanent and unchanging expression, is favourable only to a partial inharmonious effect,"⁸⁹ Yeats found masks more striking and effective than the simple heads. Yeats, further praising the Noh for its use of masks, says, "what could be more suitable than that Cuchulain, let us, a half-legendary person should show to us a face, not made before the looking glass by some leading player -- but moulded by some distinguished artist?"⁹⁰ Shotaru Oshima, a Japanese critic, also talks about the reason that faced Yeats to take up this form: "The Mask,... may be better suited than the actor's face to express the idea of the dramatist, since it is quite free from all the characteristics of the actor--- Moreover, Yeats held the opinion that the emotions of a character can be expressed not by the movements of the performer's facial muscles but by the movement of his whole body."⁹¹

Yeats was also lured by the rich traditional language of the Noh plays and by the fact that these plays were an outcome of their inheritance of "a knowledge learned in

89. H.F.B. Brett Smith ed., The Four Ages of Poetry . (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1953), p.35.

90. W.B. Yeats, Plays and Controversies, p.417.

91. Shotaru Oshima, Yeats and the Japan (Japan: Keio University Press, 1965), pp.53-4.

leisure and contemplation."⁹² For Yeats these plays were the creations of world wherein the "learned and simple had come to share in common much allusion and symbol."⁹³

The use of chorus in the Noh plays also delighted Yeats and he used it in his plays. According to Fenollosa, the function of the Noh-chorus "is poetical comment, and it carries the mind beyond what the action exhibits to the core of spiritual meaning."⁹⁴ According to Yeats, "the main purpose of the chorus is to preserve the mood while it rests the mind by change of attention."⁹⁵ In the Japanese plays chorus is a means to prolong the continuity of the nobler mood. Thus it helped Yeats to prolong the moments of stillness on the stage. Chorus also links the audience with the stage exactly like the Waki of the Noh. Like the chorus in the Noh, Yeats's chorus, too, was not to participate in the action of the play.

The stage setting of the Noh plays suited Yeats's own dramatic intentions. Yeats wanted to do away with stage properties except for a patterned screen, wherein the poetic description of the surroundings was the only means by which

92. W.B. Yeats, Essays and Introductions, p.229.

93. W.B. Yeats, Plays and Controversies, p.208.

94. Ezra Pound and Ernest Fenollosa, The Classic Noh Theatre of Japan (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1971), p.120.

95. See W.B. Yeats, Sophocle's King Oedipus: A Preface (London: Macmillan, 1928), VI, p.119.

the audience's imagination was to create an appropriate scene in their minds. Both Yeats's plays and Noh plays use natural lights opposed to the coloured lights. Yeats even wrote: "The most effective lighting is the lighting we are most accustomed to in our rooms."⁹⁶ Both Noh as well as Yeats's plays employ sidelights or footlights. The spiritual aspect of these plays also influenced Yeats who wanted to sound the deeper resonance of life. Noh plays also attracted him because they were written for a small audience, who were wise and intelligent. These plays were short because they were concerned with a single uncomplicated emotion, idea or image.

Yeats's chief concern as a dramatic critic and playwright was to bring out a fusion of different elements of drama, briefly outlined above, so that the resultant product appears like a pure flame. The Noh plays came quite handy to Yeats in this respect.

96. W.B. Yeats, Four Plays for dancers, p. 3.

CHAPTER II

PLAYS OF THE EARLY PHASE

W.B. Yeats's plays of the early phase comprise The Countess Cathleen, The Land of Heart's Desire, Cathleen ni Houlihan, The Pot of Broth, The Shadowy Waters, and The Hour Glass. These plays do not demonstrate any thematic continuity. But they are grouped together to determine Yeats's early endeavour of selecting suitable dramatic technique and verse form. These plays show Yeats's adherence to the manifesto of the Irish Dramatic Movement and at the same time foretell his tendency for abstraction which he adopts later on.

I

The Countess Cathleen

The Countess Cathleen (1889), Yeats's first fruit of dramatic apprenticeship, illustrates his deep involvement during this time in Irish nationalism, as well as his urge to create symbolic rather than realistic characters. The play demonstrates Yeats's attempts to transcend his folk tale material and "to show in a vision something of the face of Ireland."¹ It is his first attempt to unite poetry and Drama. It follows a systematically developed plot with conversational verse, written in contemporary idiom. The play also shows an adequate attempt at characterization

1. W.B. Yeats, Collected Works 8 Vols (Stratford-On-Avon : A.H. Bullen, 1968), p.1.

along the conventional lines. Since its concern primarily is with the idea of patriotism and self-sacrifice, psychological probing into its characters is not attempted.

Its theme is taken from the legend of Countess Cathleen O'Shea, described in a book of folklore, entitled Fairy and Folk Tales of Irish Peasantry.² The play deals with the story of Countess Cathleen who happens to visit a famine-stricken part of Ireland, which was also visited by two demons disguised as marchants. These merchants visit this land in order to buy the souls of starving men at a high price. But as soon as Countess Cathleen comes to know about this, she orders her steward to sell her entire property and provide food to these starving men in order to save their souls. At last, for this national cause she even barter away her own soul and dies. But contrary to the terms of the barter, it is not the demons but angels who come to carry away her soul. It is because

The light of lights
Looks always on the motive, not the deed,
The shadow of Shadows on the deed alone.³

The play, thus, besides being relevant to the contemporary Ireland, has a streak of mystical experience as

2. Dennis Donoghue, ed., W.B. Yeats: Memoirs (London: Macmillan, 1972), p.41.

3. W.B. Yeats, Collected Plays, p.50.

well in presenting Cathleen eager to renounce this materialistic world for some higher spiritual satisfaction. The play conforms to Yeats's declaration that "the real world is not altogether rejected, it is but touched here and there."⁴ In this play the world of reality relates only to the contemporary wave of nationalism and patriotism idealistically realised in the nation's readiness for maximum sacrifice. But the mythical and morality motives take the play beyond its realistic moorings. It becomes a drama of spiritual exploration involving the dialectic whether man's soul is his own property or a divine means for the welfare of general humanity. Countess Cathleen rises above her personal spiritual concerns and takes her soul as a gift of God to be used for the spiritual and even material welfare of mankind. Hence the significance attached to the entity called 'soul' acquires a mystical dimension where redemption or damnation is not envisioned in the individual's terms, but as part of a general scheme for the whole humanity.

The play uses the morality pattern of temptation, surrender to or victory over it, and eventual damnation or salvation. This pattern has been slightly modified to suit Yeats's dramatic needs. There is temptation here presented

4. W.B. Yeats, Essays and Introductions, p.243.

by the devil. But so far as the Countess's surrender to it is concerned, it is not motivated by any inner weakness or wavering as is the usual pattern in Morality plays, but necessitated by external exigencies to which her benign soul responds. This corresponds to Yeats's belief that though the action on the stage includes few characters, it should suggest a larger phenomenon of life. For Yeats, "Drama should be extravagant with an emphasis far greater than that of life."⁵ He considered a play not merely as an imitation of reality as it is, but an imaginative rendering of this reality, so that the play gains universal appeal. Cathleen has been presented as an archetype of Ireland not only by Yeats but by a number of other dramatists, like Sean O'Casey. Yeats's play is a complex blending of myth, mysticism, and patriotism. This complex thematic pattern develops along the lines of a conventional realistic play.

The plot develops on the pattern of a naturalistic, well-made play of an Ibsen or a Zola. It has a beginning, a middle and an end passing through complications, to climax and finally leading to resolution. The play opens in the house of Shemus Rua. Here three persons -- Shemus, Mary, his wife, and their son Teigue are talking of the starvation caused by drought. Soon Cathleen, along with her nurse Oona

5. W.B. Yeats, Plays and Controversies, pp.157-8.

and Aleel, a poet, reaches this land. Her charity flows instantaneously at the sight of the suffering humanity. To alleviate their hardships she distributes money to them. Soon after they leave their house, Teigue and his father are seen inviting two devils presently disguised as merchants into their house. These two merchants announce that whosoever deals with them will get heavy price in return. The motive of the merchants has not yet been disclosed to underscore suspense. However, the suspense is not sustained for long. Shemus discloses that they have come to buy the souls of these starving men. Both Shemus and Teigue agree to sell their souls for money, to overcome the hardships created by the famine. Thus the opening scene establishes the initial dramatic situation where the demons are shown succeeding in their Satanic designs. Between scenes II and IV we notice two quick threatened reversals which create a sea-saw movement in the plot. Cathleen having known the damned predicament of her people asks them to get their souls back. In return she offers them all her property. Frustration of the devils's designs seems to be on the anvil, which seems to effect the reversal of the initial dramatic issue. But this threatened reversal is superceded by another threatened reversal with an element of surprise in it. This is when Yeats makes Cathleen feel, for a moment, almost run down. She shrieks with desparation for divine intervention.⁶

In scene V, the peasants are shown bartering away their souls to these merchants, indicating that the first threatened reversal does not materialise. The movement of the plot reaches its climax, when Cathleen in utter desparation, offers her own soul to these two devils, on the condition that the souls of the peasants are restored to them. The merchants agree to it and the play's action goes towards the final conclusion in the fulfilment of the term of the contract. But a big reversal takes place when instead of demons, angels appear to take the glorious soul of Countess to its divine habitat:

The light beats down; the gates of pearl are wide;
And she is passing to the floor of peace.⁷

The above narration of the action of the play shows the modified morality pattern used by Yeats. This is a play of ideas. Hence characters of flesh and blood are not presented here. These characters tend to be abstract. The play has a spiritual thesis. But the thesis is not debated.

As regards characterization, Yeats follows the conventional pattern of identifying and individualising the characters. But they are more easily taken as symbols than as solid earthly personalities. Though Yeats gets ample opportunities here for a psychological probing into the psyche of the

7. Ibid., p.50.

protagonist, he does not exploit this. This is a pointer towards his future obsession with abstraction. This is in conformity with his belief that the characters are the creations of artist's own mind existing only as an idea and symbol, not as personalities of blood and flesh. Countess Cathleen thus remains in our mind more as a symbol of sacrifice, of nationhood than as a woman. Yeats himself has clarified his position in this regard:

The play is symbolic: the two demons who go hither and thither buying the souls are the world, and their gold is the pride of the eyes. The Countess herself is a soul which is always, in all laborious and self-denying persons, selling itself into captivity, and unrest that it may redeem 'God's children', and finding the peace it has not sought because all high motives are of the substance of peace.⁸

The play uses conversational English for its dialogue. The verse used is colloquial and varied to distinguish one character from the other. The stage-setting follows the realistic pattern. The background sounds of thunder and use of colours are realistic. Yeats's dramatic strategy at this stage of his career is clear from what he wants the stage to look like: "I want the dark dress and the dark curtain to fix... on the minds of audience before the almost white stage is disclosed."⁹ Here he has presented a dim

8. W.B. Yeats, Letters, p. 319.

9. Quoted in Katharine Worth, The Irish Drama of Europe (London: The Athlone Press of the University of London, 1978), p.25.

impressionistic view of the wood with stylized trees painted in flat colour upon a gold and a diapered sky. This stylized pattern looks forward to the extreme formalism of Yeats's future dance plays. But its setting for the first scene conforms to the standard theatrical interior drama of this period.

The play, apart from its call for patriotism and nationalism, is rooted in abstraction and intellectualism which according to Yeats was an important element of drama. It is paradoxical that he praised Sean O'Casey for the strength of characterization while he himself was interested in reducing the characters to abstractions. It was so because of his concern with the fusion of myth, realism and mysticism.

II

The Land of Heart's Desire

The Land of Heart's Desire (1894) was Yeats's second play to be performed. The play belongs to the first phase of Yeats's creative career known as the phase of the Celtic Twilight. This phase is characterised by a conflict between the materialistic world and the spiritual and remote world of the fairies and angels. The main principle working in this phase was Yeats's belief that "to the greater poets everything they see has its relation to the national life,

and through them to the universal and divine life."¹⁰ It is this divinity which Yeats has tried to achieve in the present plays as well as in his other plays of this period. This play is based on Ireland's legendary folklore which came to the chief reservoir for many dramatists to draw on.

The play narrates the tale of nostalgia of a soul for the spiritual world. The play's motive is explained in the Introductory chapter to Fairies and Folktales of Irish Peasantry, where Yeats says that "on midsummer's Eve, when the bonfires are lighted on every hill in honour of St. John, the fairies are at their gayest, and sometimes steal away beautiful mortals to be their brides."¹¹ The theme of the play depicts the desire of the protagonist, Mary, to transcend earthly life of materialism and get into the divine world. She is shown as having been fascinated by the world of the book of legends, because of which she always neglects her household duties. For this she is blamed by her mother-in-law, Bridget Bruin. What charms Mary most in this book is the tale of Princess Edain, who in a state of trance, went to a world:

Where nobody gets old and Godly and grave
Where nobody gets old and bitter of tongue.¹²

This land so attracts Mary that she, careless of all her

10. W.B. Yeats, Letters to the New Island, p.174.

11. W.B. Yeats, Essays and Introductions, p.184.

12. W.B. Yeats, Collected Plays, p.55.

duties as a wife, calls upon the fairies to take her away. Consequently, a fairy child enters this house and casts a spell on the people of the Bruin family. The fairy child starts singing and dancing, and kisses Mary, which sends her into a trance. At last Mary, possessed by the magical power of Sidhe in the form of the fairy child dies. The play ends with the following choric lines of Father Hart:

Thus do the spirits of evil snatch their prey
Almost out of the very hand of God;
Thus the lonely of the heart is withered away.¹³

The play opens as a curious blending of realism and symbolism. Its realistic element is represented by the setting: "A room with a hearth on the floor in the middle of a deep aclove to the right. There are benches and a table; and a crucifix on the wall. The aclove is full of a glow of light from the fire, on the table are seen food and drink."¹⁴ The time, described is that of night and the light coming into the room is that of the glimmering moon. The rays of the moon are being filtered into the room through trees. The view outside the room is that of a forest which, seen through the glimmering moon-light, looks like a vague mysterious world. The realistic moon and the

13. Ibid., p.72.

14. Ibid., p.53.

mysterious world of the forest described in the stage-direction immediately establish the dual world that Yeats wants to present here. The duality is between the earthly world of restrictions, limitations and constraints suggested by the enclosed room and its family members. The world of earthly life is hinted at through the items of food, drinks, fire-place and members of the family sitting around the fire-place. The other world suggested by the forest is away from this earthly world. This other world has not been described in detail. It has been left vague and mysterious. This is the world which is to be explored through the spiritual response of the protagonist to it. The stage-setting directly points to the conflict that is going to take place between the two worlds. The contrast between the two worlds pointed out in the stage direction is a deliberate attempt on Yeats's part to highlight the conflict between the dual existences. It is in this contrast that the meaning of the play lies. Here we see the influence of Gordon Craig's symbolic stage-setting on Yeats. Even the scenery like that of Maeterlink's plays is highly suggestive with the door of Bridget's kitchen being open to let the moonlight into it which enjoys the late sun-set that carries the eye far off into some vague and mysterious world. This was so, because according to Yeats, visual effects should be functional and should contribute to the meaning of the play, and make the whole picture as it were moving together.

Here the hinted dramatic conflict is at two levels. One is between Mary with her desire to attain the other world and the entire family mainly Bridget Bruin, all tied down to earthly existence. The other conflict is Mary's own vascillation in her choice between the realistic world of her in-laws and the other world of mystery and vagueness. But here Yeats has not worked out either of these two conflicts dramatically. This is, because Yeats was more interested in showing the impact of this mysterious and undefined world on the willingly receptive mind of a young woman who is still not fully caught up in the trap of utterly materialistic life. In such a situation even the vague and undefined world of dreams appears to the willing mind more fascinating without much rational fuss. Here we notice the influence of Morris, Pater, Boehme and that of Samkara philosophy on Yeats which collectively strengthened his belief in the dreams. He himself admitted this influence.¹⁵

The play also illustrates Yeats's concept that "the mystical life is the centre of all that I do and all that I think and all that I write."¹⁶ This is the reason why Yeats has set the play in remote times. One advantage of this remoteness is that a writer can include in his works

15. W.B. Yeats, Autobiographies, p.253.

16. W.B. Yeats, Letters, p.210, See his Essays, p.232.

elements which need not be vigorously tested by rational scrutiny and logic. Hence, when a ghostly arm comes and knocks at the door to make Mary leave this materialistic world and go to the other world, we do not question its rationality. According to Andrew Parkin "It is one of the many such symbolic pieces of stage business which Yeats used to embody irrational, supernatural powers invading the lives of human beings."¹⁷

The same holds true of Yeats's art of characterization. The symbolic indications of the characters have robbed them of their human attributes. Almost all the characters are shadowy like those of Maeterlink whose art Yeats has appreciated thus: "Maeterlink created characters as faint as a breath upon a looking glass, symbols who can speak a language, slow and heavy with dreams because their own life is but a dream."¹⁸ Mary's mother-in-law appears more human than the protagonist herself, because she shows the concern of common humanity in her daily life. But Mary herself remains shadowy. Yeats did it perhaps to focus upon the unity of impressions which is to be achieved through a combined function of subdued characterization, scanty action, and powerful assertion of the visionary world with the help of poetry.

17. Andrew Parkin, The Dramatic Imagination of W.B. Yeats, pp.58-9.

18. W.B. Yeats, Essays and Introductions, p.370.

Structurally the play follows a conventional pattern constituted of exposition, conflict, crisis and climax that lead to the final resolution. The exposition of the play is constituted of the initial conflict between the Bride and the mother-in-law in which the latter explains the circumstances leading to the daughter-in-law's neglect of household duties. The complication occurs when Mary responds to the call of the other world and further estranges herself from the mistress of the house. But she continues wavering because of the vagueness of the other world. Movement and progress in the action is provided by Yeats not by any narration about the relative superiority of the other world but by making a fairy child actually appear, dance and sing, which involuntarily draws Mary towards this ritual, confirming the victory of the supernatural enticement. The climax and dilemma occur simultaneously when at the highest pitch of the dancing activity Mary collapses. This resolves both the conflicts into Mary's journey into the other world.

The play like the earlier one is written in blank verse and in the unrhymed pentametres that eventually get interspersed with tetrametres. The play also uses music, song, rhythm and dance. The dance shows the dramatist's desire to exploit the physical potentialities of theatre. It also points to the four dance plays based on the Noh-technique where dance is central both to action and

theme. The dance has a magical impact on Mary which is transmitted to the readers as well. Thus it has a dual function both within and outside the drama.

The presentation of the action of the play shows Yeats's fascination for French acting which remained with him all through his dramatic career. Here the still and the statuesque acting is similar to the little and slight movements of the French actors. However, Yeats himself felt dissatisfied with the play and thus criticised it as a trifle and a vague play. He also became critical of its "exaggeration of sentiment and sentimental beauty,"¹⁹ and of its womanish introspection, its hollow images and shadowy figures with their sweet, insinuating feminine voice. But according to J.I.M. Stewart "The Land of Heart's Desire, is not sentimental in the manner, say of Barie's Mary Rose, another play about a girl called by the fairies. It is saved from this by the prominence of magic, which is here not literary, antiquarian, or in any way esoteric, but draws directly upon folklore having the feel of living persuasions still."²⁰

19. W.B. Yeats, Letters, p.434.

20. J.I.M. Stewart, "W.B. Yeats," in F.P. Wilson and Bonamy Dobree eds., The Oxford History of English Literature (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1966), p.307.

III

The Shadowy Waters

The Shadowy Waters (1904) has received considerable attention of the critics. For T.S. Eliot it is "one of the most perfect expression of the vague enchanted beauty of the (pre-Rephealite) school."²¹ The play undoubtedly, is the most representative of this land of heart's desire which lured him in this early phase of the Celtic Twilight, and conforms to his view in his letter to G. Russell, where he writes "I am deep in 'Celtic Mysticism', the whole thing is forming an elaborate vision."²² In his letter to A.E. in 1899, Yeats discusses the symbolic details of his own recent vision:

My dear Russell.... Last night I had a dream of two lovers... watched over by a blackbird, or raven, who warned them against the malice and slander of the world.

You are perhaps right about the symbol, it may be merely a symbol of ideal human marriage. I may be getting the whole story of the relation of man and woman in symbol-- all that makes the subject of The Shadowy Waters.²³

So the play dramatizes this vision of the wish for eternal union of two lovers in the guise of an Irish-folklore in keeping with Yeats's aim to use Irish material for the Abbey plays. Yeats referring to this folklore says:

Once upon a time, when herons built their nests in old man's beards, Forgael, a Sea-King of ancient Ireland,

21. T.S. Eliot, Selected Prose (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1953, p.202.

22. W.B. Yeats, Letters, p.295.

23. Ibid., p.324.

was promised by certain human headed birds love of the supernatural intensity and happiness. These birds were the souls of the dead, and he followed them overseas towards the sunset, where their final rest is. By means of a magical harp, he could call them about him when he would and listen to their speech. His friend, Airbric, and the sailors of this ship, thought him mad, and that he and they were being lured to destruction. Presently they captured a ship, and found a beautiful woman upon it, and Forgeal subdued her and his own rebellious sailors by the sound of his harp. The sailors fled upon the other ship, and Forgeal and the woman drifted on alone following the birds, awaiting death and what comes after, or some mysterious transformation of the flesh, an embodiment of every lover's dream.²⁴

Una Ellis-Fermor is right in believing that here "the central theme is the realisation of ideal love in terms of, not by superseding of, natural love."²⁵ The play amply demonstrates Yeats's escapist attitude, a main feature of the first phase. Its plot revolves round the dream world of perfect love. Here, we see how Forgeal, the hero, rejects the worldly love of "the brief longing and deceiving hope" for "some strange love that world knows nothing of, some ever living woman as you think, one that can cast no shadow, being unearthly."²⁶ The hero is hanging between the earthly and the spiritual love, and says :

24. See W.B. Yeats's Note in 'The Arrow' Nov. 1906, quoted in A.N. Jaferes and A.S. Knowland, eds., A Commentary on the Collected Plays of W.B. Yeats (London: Macmillan, 1975), p.60.

24. Una Ellis-Fermor, The Irish Dramatic Movement, p. 102.

I can see nothing plain; all's mystery
 Yet sometimes there is a torch inside my head
 That makes all clear, but when the light is gone
 I have but images, analogies,
 But when the torch is lit
 All that is impossible is certain,
 I plunge into abyss.²⁷

This speech depicts the uncertainty and confusion of Yeats's mind that engulfed him all through this period. In this regard Dennis Donoghue opines that "In terms of time, the tension between Yeats's two worlds is that between the transience of the natural world and the idea of permanence, in terms of space, between Aibric's habitable world and Forgael's country at the end of the world 'where no child is born but to outlive the moon,' in natural terms, between the body and that mysterious transformation of the flesh which Yeats rather ironically invoked."²⁸ The play also conforms to his desire to establish a mystical order, "a ritual system of evocation and meditation-- to reunite the perception of the spirit, of the divine, with natural beauty."²⁹

The play also shows the influence of Villier's Axel. Yeats's Forgael and Dectora recall to our mind the figures of Axel and Sara of Axel. Forgael, like Axel, shows to his

27. Ibid., p.152.

28. Dennis Donoghue, The Third Voice: Modern British and American Verse Drama (London: Princeton University Press, 1959), p.36.

29. W.B. Yeats, Autobiographies, p.253.

beloved that the dream is always greater than its actual materialisation.

Again the play conforms to his desire to establish an Irish theatre of art, beauty and folklore, which would be different from the then prevalent commercial theatre. Yeats once wrote that: "I want to do a little play which can be acted and half chanted and so help the return of bigger poetical plays to the stage. The new Shadowy Waters could be acted on two big tables in a drawing-room."³⁰ The playwright's dramatic intentions show in what direction Yeats will move in future in his endeavour to discover and establish an ideal theatre of his heart's desire.

The play is a short piece, for which Yeats had always had a preference. Besides, the play is simple as far as the events are concerned. The unity of effect is achieved through the singleness of events constituting the main plot of the play. To make this one-act structure simple and austere, Yeats follows the unities of time, place and action. In fact the simplicity, precision and lack of complexity in the action of the play are the result of Yeats's striving for the Greek austerity in the structure of his plays. The play exemplifies Yeats's theory of Drama in respect of symbolism. Both Forgael and Dectora symbolise eternal love. They no longer appear to be the creatures of

30. W.B. Yeats, Letters, p.327.

this earth, of flesh and blood, but of some mysterious world. Yeats calls this play "mystical and magical beyond anything he had done,"³¹ and "more a ritual than a human story."³²

The story of the play revolves round the desire and realisation of a dream world of perfect love. Its main protagonist, Forgael is the captain of a pirates' ship. He, like Shelley's Alastor, is haunted by a dream of some ideal and eternal beauty, and rejects the earthly love of brief longings and deceiving hope for "some strange love that world knows nothing of, some ever-living woman as you think one that can cast no shadow being unearthly."³³ He therefore sets sailing on a quest-pilgrimage, with a band of sailors, steeped in worldliness, who are a foil to him. While Forgael is on his way, the spirits of the dead, changed into man headed-birds, revolve round his ship and entice Forgael into a dream-world. He too now starts behaving strangely, which is irritating to the entire crew, who now decide to kill Forgael. Aibric Forgael's friend also requests him not to undertake such a dangerous adventure in pursuit of the ideal dream, but Forgael having firm faith in the dream world responds :

What the world's million lips are thirsting for
Must be substantial somewhere.³⁴

31. Ibid., p.280.

32. Ibid., p.425.

33. W.B. Yeats, Collected Plays, p.150.

34. Ibid., p.151.

Now Sailors try to persuade Aibric also to kill Forgael, but Aibric refuses to do so. In the meanwhile, a rich vessel which is attacked and where the King is killed, is noticed by these sailors. Its Queen has been captivated. Now the Queen reproaches Forgael for the evil deed. Forgael, on the other hand, thinks her to be the woman he is in quest of, and thinks that she would give him the perfect love he is seeking. So, Forgael casts a spell with his magical harp on everybody, and soon this Queen, called Dectora, identifies him with her husband, the dead King. Now she is reluctant to leave Forgael even after she is free from the spell cast by him. At this Aibric feels so jealous of these two lovers that he cuts the rope of the ship. So these lovers die and pass away from this world into their own dream-world.

The brief summary of the play given above shows that it is a scanty play without any strong element of conflict. But Yeats has managed to present confrontation between the two worlds at two levels. The first superficial level is the opposition between the world of materialism and down-to-earth reality. The sailors represent this world. The other world is the undefined vague world towards which Forgael's adventurous journey is directed. This world which is non-existent and a foolish vision for the sailors is the world which Forgael must seek for realisation of his inner urge for completion of his self. The self can be completed only when it is united with its complementary part which is

temporarily separated from it because of its absorption in worldliness. Dectora is the complementary part which is released from her bondage to worldly-life through the death of her husband. When Forgael realises that his completion of the self is attained through his union with Dectora, he finds it immaterial whether his ship sails further or his sailors abandon it for good. This is because the quest of the self for completion is completed. Thus through the conflict in the mind and soul of Forgael, he has been reduced to the minimum level.

While the characters of the sailors are endowed with flesh and blood, indicated in their resolve to remain rooted in their wordly and earthly existence, the character of Forgael appears symbolic. His yearnings and passionate quest are directed towards abstraction which is a mystical self-completion of the human soul with its union with an ideal perfection represented by love. Thus, Yeats's interest in characterisation as symbolic realisation of his abstract emotions is a continuation of the trend that we noticed from the very beginning of his dramatic career. However, Yeats's notable advance in his dramaturgy is discernible in his handling of the verse-medium here which the dramatist himself has called as "probably the best verse I have written"³⁵ F.R. Higgins, commenting on its verse, says "it is loaded with drowsy beauty."³⁶ But here to heighten the

35. W.B. Yeats, Letters, p.320.

36. F.R. Higgins, 'Yeats and the Poetic Drama in Ireland,' in L.Robinson The Irish Theatre (London: Sidgwick and Jackson. 1957), p.79.

tension Yeats has juxtaposed both verse and prose passages. The sailors, who speak of earthly life, use prose while projection of higher reality is conveyed through verse. This juxtaposition goes well with the theme of conflict between the earthly and the heavenly life. According to Donoghue "The dichotomy between the two worlds is strictly underlined by this means."³⁷ When Aibric and the sailors move away from Forgael and his birds, prose-reality and poetic-reality simultaneously claim the audience's attention. Here Yeats has attained that simplicity of verse that he had striven to attain -- a verse, transparent, colloquial and uncomplicated. The play, in its use of homely phrases and idiom of daily speech, conforms to his concept that "the element of strength in poetic language is common idiom, just as the element of strength in poetic construction is common passion."³⁸ It also accords with his never-ceasing urge for the style based on spoken words to get what he called "creaking shoes and liquorice-root into abstract speech, and combine poetic construction with common passion."³⁹ Besides, the play makes a very effective use of music which illustrates Yeats's leaning towards the

37. Dennis Donoghue, The Third Voice, p.40.

38. W.B. Yeats, Letters, p.462.

39. Ibid.

musical-mode of drama. Here words attain to the functional status of applied arts, effecting a beautiful synthesis, such as in the scene where Forgael's harp turns out to be a musical instrument to suggest his powers. No sooner does he touch its strings than a dreaminess is cast upon all characters blotting out the time, place and bitter reality. It portrays Wagner's influence on Yeats. Indeed Yeats, like Wagner, depends heavily on the power of music to suggest the transcendental nature of those irrational emotions that have taken the half-willing lovers in their hold. The music of the play shows that Yeats, like Mallarme and Macterlink, who influenced him deeply, aims at a new fusion of word and music and seems to move towards his ideal of infinite, delicate, and suggestive art of interior like theirs. This play is Yeats's first experiment with music drama.

The stage setting of the play, as Yeats had endeavoured to introduce in his symbolic plays, is highly suggestive. He discards the naturalistic, elaborate, and decorated stage. He says "Its whole picture, as it were, moves together, the sky, and the sea and clouds are as it were actors."⁴⁰ This shows Yeats's endeavour to make visual elements a part of the dramatic rhythm of the play. He even said that "the actor and the words put into his mouth are

40. Ibid., p.425

always the one thing that matters."⁴¹ Again the colour effects of the play correspond with Yeats's belief that decor and costumes should be expressive of the play's mood. This we saw in the preceding play also. Thus Yeats advising Sturge Moore, who was the play's stage designer said, "The play (The Shadowy Waters) is dreamy and dim and the colours should be the same [say] a blue-green soil against an indigo-blue black cloth and the mask and bulwark indigo-blue. The persons in blue and green with some copper ornament."⁴² Here the blue and the black colour suggest the mood of withdrawal. Its colour scheme also conforms to the dramatist's dislike for over-literary approach to drama and to his sensitivity for visual effects of the scene. The play amply illustrates Yeats's anxiety to create a theatre where rhythm, music, colour and symbol will operate in union to create the totality of effect of the play. It also evinces Yeats's inclination towards the abstract in which even concrete, familiar emotions are distanced to produce the impression of remoteness.

These elements here seem to lead the dramatist far away from grappling with human issues and human world. The two Cathleen plays deeply rooted in the contemporary politics, and The Land of Heart's Desire remains wedded to

41. W.B. Yeats, Explorations, p.179.

2. See W.B. Yeats's 'Letter of March, 1903' in U. Bridge, ed., W.B. Yeats and T. Sturge Moore: Their Correspondence 1901-1937 (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1953), p.7.

human impulse to break from the constraints of sublunary existence and live in the world of joy and freedom. But in the present play both these aspects have been laid down in keeping with Yeats's desire to have a theatre where image, ideas, symbols, rhythms and gestures are all fused together.

IV

Cathleen ni-Houlihan:

The Land of Heart's Desire and The Shadowy Waters give ample hints of the direction which Yeats was going to follow in pursuance of his theory of drama which was to be remote, abstract and symbolical. Cathleen ni-Houlihan, however, belies this assumption. It demonstrates Yeats's wavering between remote themes of purely spiritual nature and themes related to contemporary national affairs. This wavering was not due to any uncertainty in his mind in regard to the fulfilment of his dramatic aspirations of having something in the nature of total theatre. It was due to his commitment to the Abbey as well as to his continuing experiments with drama and his refusal to adopt any particular technique uncritically.

Cathleen ni-Houlihan (1903) is his first prose play. Here the protagonist's urge for some spiritual world of the above referred to plays is changed into her cry for her own country. This play, conforming to the ideals of the Abbey theatre to awaken patriotic feelings of Irish men, deals

with nationalism. Yeats himself has described the play "as the call of the Nation."⁴³ He claims to have been inspired by one of his dreams. He says, "one night I had a dream almost as distinct as a vision, of a cottage where there was well-being and firelight and talk of a marriage, and into the midst of that cottage there came an old woman in a long cloak. She was Ireland herself, that Cathleen Ni-Houlihan for whose sake so many have gone to their death."⁴⁴ We see that in The Shadowy Waters and The Land of Heart's Desire, there was a world of reality rendered in terms of dream, whereas in this play it is a dream rendered in terms of solid reality, which is not an easy task to undertake. Yeats himself has stated his dramatic intention thus: "My subject is Ireland and its struggle for independence."⁴⁵

Though the play depicts the contemporary scene of Ireland, Yeats, to make it popular and intelligible among the common men, has linked it to one of Ireland's popular ballads, called 'Shan-Van Vocht' or 'Poor Old Woman' based on the traditional French help for Ireland's rebellion. However, the play acquires legendary implications which have

43. Russell K. Alspach, ed., The Variorum Edition of the Plays of W.B. Yeats (New York: Macmillan, 1966), pp.234-5.

44. W.B. Yeats, Where there is Nothing (London: Macmillan, 1903), p.232.

45. See Russell K. Alspach ed., The Variorum Edition of the Plays of W.B. Yeats, pp. 234-5.

a wider significance. This blending of the actual and the legendary focuses on the intensity of the symbolic tension in the play between the choice of personal life with marriage and family, and choice of the need for national service. Indirectly here there is a sort of Hegellian conflict between two equally valid choices. Only the situation in which the hero is put makes one choice incompatible with the other, without questioning the validity of the either. The play recalls the times when the formation of Irish Revolutionary Movement took place in mid 1790s, under the leadership of Tone.⁴⁶ It highlights the contemporary Irish struggle for independence from the British rule. This also corresponds to his own struggle to unite art, politics, philosophy, and through symbolic representation mythology in order to attain what he calls the 'unity of being' and 'unity of culture.' In this context Yeats said that : "We had in Ireland imaginative stories, which the uneducated classes knew and even sang, and might we not make those stories current among the educated classes, rediscovering for the work's sake what I have called 'the applied arts of literature,' the association of literature, that is, with music, speech and dance; and at least, it might so deepen the political passion of the nation that all, artists and poets, craftsmen and day-labourers

46. For a detailed account of this see J.C. Backett, A Short History of Ireland (London: Macmillan, 1952), p.194.

would accept a common design."⁴⁷ Yeats was sure that by absorbing the ancient Irish legends he could attain 'unity of culture.' Thus, besides depicting the contemporary Irish political scene, the play at a deeper level also hints at Yeats's ideal of drama.

The setting of the play is the west of Ireland. The time described is the time when French forces landed in 1798. The play opens with a cheerful atmosphere, into which Bruin's family is shown making preparations for their son's wedding. They talk of the fortunes resulting from this marriage of Michael, who is lost in the thoughts of his bride. But soon, the sounds of cheering are heard outside the prospective bridgeroom's house. Just after this, we are told of an Old Woman coming down the road. A little later we are told that this Old Woman, still unidentified, is making contacts with all the young men of Ireland. The following scene opens with Michael's return from the house of his would-be in-law's, having made all the arrangements for the wedding. This peaceful homely mood soon changes into a serious one when this Old Woman enters their house. Now the fact that she stands for Ireland, symbolising the need of the nation to get the help of young persons of Ireland, is revealed. The captivity of Ireland under British rule is explicitly brought out when Bridget asks

47. W.B. Yeats, Autobiographies, p.194.

"what was it put you wandering,"⁴⁸ and this Old Woman answers, "too many strangers in the house."⁴⁹ Then this Old lady narrates how these strangers confiscated her property and how a large number of her countrymen laid down their lives to help her in getting her lands back. She discloses her identity that she is Cathleen-- the daughter of Houlihan. Michael, listening to this story, gets so influenced that he immediately offers his help. His parents however try to divert his attention towards his marriage. Then comes Patrick telling that "There are ships in the Bay; the French are landing at Kilala."⁵⁰ Michael is so moved by this news that despite his beloved Delia's request not to join it, "he breaks away from Delia, stands for a second at the door, then rushes out, following the Old Woman's voice."⁵¹ He eventually joins the French army and becomes one of those that:

Shall be remembered for ever,
 Shall be alive for ever,
 Shall be speaking for ever,
 The people shall hear them for ever.⁵²

Here there is great dramatic potential for exploiting a

48. W.B. Yeats, Collected Plays, p.81.

49. Ibid., p.87.

50. Ibid., p.88.

51. Ibid.

52. Ibid., p.86.

possible inner conflict in Michael. The dramatist could have tapped the emotional resources of the situation where the prospective bridgroom had to choose between two equally valid aspects of existence. Yeats here, perhaps restrained, as he was by the exigencies of writing a short play, considerably subdues the human aspect. The play's patently desired appeal was to arouse the Irishmen to their cause of nationalism. He himself, later in his life, said in 'Man and the Echo':

Did that play of mine
Send out certain men the English shot.⁵³

The play fully conforms to Yeats's declaration that "There is no feeling, except religious feelings, that moves minds of men so powerfully as national."⁵⁴ Its patriotism again corresponds to his early announcement that "It [the Irish literary drama] will eventually -- furnish a vehicle for the literary expression of the national thought, and idea of Ireland such as has not hitherto existed."⁵⁵ Even its songs are suggestive of nationalism, for instance Yeats's version of Gaelic folk song, 'Dannachadh Ban', is full of these feelings:

53. W.B. Yeats, Collected Poems (London : Macmillan, 1933), p.393.

54. W.B. Yeats, Uncollected Prose, p.101.

55. See Una Ellis-Fermor, The Irish Dramatic Movement, p.37.

I will go cry with a woman,
 For yellow-haired Donough is dead,
 With a hampen rope for a neckcloth,
 And a white cloth on his head.⁵⁶

The play, because of this nationalistic strain, has been criticised as mere propaganda. But Yeats denies such charges, and defending himself says: "It may be said that it is a political play of a propagandist kind. This I deny. I took a piece of human life, thoughts that men had felt, hopes that they had died for, and I put this into what I believe to be a sincere dramatic form. I had never written a play to advocate any kind of opinion and I think that such a play would necessarily be a bad art."⁵⁷ He further says "I had a very vivid dream one night, and I made Cathleen ni-Houlihan out of this dream. But if some external necessity had forced me to write nothing but drama with an obviously patriotic intentions, instead of letting my work shape itself under the casual impulses of dreams and daily thoughts, I would have lost, in short time, the power to write movingly upon any theme. I could have aroused opinion, but I could not have touched the heart."⁵⁸ However, Yeats's claim is hard to accept in toto. So far as the action in the early part of the play is concerned, we

56. W.B. Yeats, Collected Plays, p.82.

57. Quoted in Elmann Richard, The Identity of Yeats (London): Macmillan, 1954), pp.295-6.

58. W.B. Yeats, Essays, p. 116.

can say that it is resonant with human feelings and urges. But soon, when the Old Woman starts her analysis of the present predicament of Ireland, the strong journalistic strain is not adequately subdued to allow the presence of the human aspect to be felt strongly. Yeats regarded literature as "always personal -- one man's vision of the world."⁵⁹ Yeats was aware of the pitfalls involved in such themes. He asserted that authors, even if they are concerned with politics, should not "enforce them to select those incidents."⁶⁰

Yeats's dramaturgy in this play is an amalgamation of the realistic devices and aspects of allegorical composition. The marriage preparation and the accompanying excitement are all in the nature of realistic drama. The characters in the first part are endowed with flesh and blood and speak the language which we can identify as belonging to living humanity. But, as soon as the allegorised figure of the Old Woman appears, even Michael tends to lose the human dimensions of his character, and tends to appear as part of the bigger allegory of Ireland, as a nation demanding sacrifice from its nationals for the freedom of their country. Cathleen's character from the beginning until the end is not attempted to be delineated with human touch.

59. W.B. Yeats, Plays and Controversies. p.56.

60. Ibid.

This is because she does not show even the least mark of the pricking of the conscience or emotional embarrassment in demanding from Michael a sacrifice at a climactic moment of his career as a human. The other characters, the villagers, constitute a crowd which remains vague and unidentifiable even in the context of the Irish struggle for freedom. At the structural level the play has a simple movement of action without much conflict to arouse any suspense. As we have shown above, the whole action is divisible into two parts. The first part deals with the mood, atmosphere, and activities of joy and happiness in regard to the life of a normal human. The second part deals with changing the normal human character into a willing sacrificial goat, to be sacrificed on the altar of nationalism without much argument. Perhaps Yeats believed, and rightly so, that a conventional theme with this ideology will not admit of any scope for individualism or humanistic values.

As mentioned earlier, Cathleen-ni-Houlihan is written in prose medium. It is a prose which is adopted from the actual speech of the Irish people. Yeats himself has said "I have written the whole play in the English of the West of Ireland, the English of the people who think in Irish."⁶¹ Yeats, like Synge, believed that the adoption of the actual

61. Russell K. Alspach ed., The Variorum Edition of the Plays of W.B. Yeats, pp. 234-5.

speech for drama requires the playwright's acquaintance with the people whose experiences he is trying to communicate. Yeats has followed this in the present play both in theory and practice. He says "one has to live among the people before one can think the thoughts of the people and speak with their tongue."⁶² However, it was a difficult experiment for Yeats who was essentially a poet and an experimentalist in versification. He confessed to Lady Gregory that "...I could not get out of that high window of dramatic verse, and in spite of all you had done for me I had not the country speech."⁶³ Yeats believed that the medium of drama whether prose or verse should be based on speech of the people who were to figure in a play.

V

The Pot of Broth

The Pot of Broth, written around 1902, was not made a part of any one of Yeats's editions of the Collected Plays, as was also the case with Where There is Nothing which was later called The Unicorn from the Stars. But later on the present play was published in a separate edition in 1911. In this regard Yeats has written,

I did not include this play in Mr. Bullen's Collected edition of my work, as it seemed too slight a thing to

62. Ibid., p.232.

63. Ibid.

perpetuate, but I found a little time ago that my own theatre had put it into rehearsal without asking my leave;... and ...American produced it without rights. I have therefore retouched it little, and once more admit it to my canon.⁶⁴

Yeats wrote it with the active help of Lady Gregory, which he has acknowledged thus, "I hardly know how much of the play is my work, for Lady Gregory helped me as she has helped in every play of mine.... This play may be more Lady Gregory's than mine, for I remember once urging her to include it in her own works."⁶⁵

Here we see something of the trifling farce of Lady Gregory's Seven Short Plays. Yeats himself has called it a "trivial, unambitious retelling of an old folktale."⁶⁶ The play narrates the tale of a beggar who manages to charm a credulous peasant woman to give him all the ingredients required to make a broth. He even makes her believe that the basic material for the broth has been extracted with the help of a magical stone that he put in the pot. In this way the beggar succeeds in hypnotizing this peasant woman by his magic. That the play heavily depends upon the verbal medium

64. W.B. Yeats's 'Note to Plays in Prose and Verse, in A.N. Jafferes and A.S. Knowland, eds., A Commentary on the Collected Plays of W.B. Yeats, pp.37-8.

65. Ibid.

66. W.B. Yeats, Autobiographies, p.452.

seems to be in conformity with the comedy of dialogue that was popular before Yeats. The play is nothing but a tale of miracles. It falls apart from what Yeats conceived of a drama, which was to be serious, intellectual and abstract. However, the play, though standing by itself, is a good stage piece. It abounds in laughter and cheerfulness, in which William Fay, first of all, appeared as a most lovable comedian and it is he, who made it as popular as Cathleen-ni Houlihan. As Yeats says "If it has a lasting interest, it is that it was the first comedy in dialect of our Movement -- Mr. William Fay was a tramp, and played it not only with great humour but with great delicacy and charm."⁶⁷ But Yeats despite all this was not pleased with it and talking of its dialect wrote:

The dialect, unlike that of Cathleen-ni-Houlihan, which was written about the same date, has not, ... the right temper, being gay, mercurial, and suggestive of rapid speech. Probably we were still under the influence of Irish novelists, who never escaped, even when they had grown up amid country speech, from the dialect of Dublin.⁶⁸

But the play clearly implies that Yeats's theory of diction preferred not the swift-moving town dialect of the Irish

67. See W.B. Yeats 'Note' in his Plays in Prose and Verse, in A.N. Jafferes and A.S. Knowland eds., A Commentary on the Collected Plays of W.B. Yeats, p.38.

68. Ibid.

novelists but the slow-moving country dialect. However, the play both technically and thematically, was unsatisfactory to Yeats. The play, though includes the magical performances showing something of occultism, has none of that spirituality and dreaminess that is characteristic of his early 'Celtic Twilight plays,' to which it seems to belong so far as its date of writing is considered. But we can say that this play stands all alone, not belonging to any of the groups of Yeats's plays.

VI

The Hour Glass

The Hour Glass was first written in 1903 in prose. Later on Yeats felt dissatisfied with its prose version and rewrote it in 1914 in verse. The play is based on a story, entitled 'The Priest's Tale' recorded by Lady Wilde. This story deals with a Priest who denies the existence of Heaven, Hell and of Purgatory. Once the Priest is visited by an angel who threatens to torture him with death within twenty four hours, unless he finds someone who believes in God Whose mercy can save him. At last he is saved by a child who assures him of the existence of the soul. The Priest then asks the child to kill him and call his pupils to see his soul escaping. This is the story dramatized in the present play. But Yeats to meet his dramatic needs and the needs of

his philosophical views brought about some changes into it. He himself admits this: "I took the plot of The Hour Glass from an Irish Folk Tale but tried to put my own philosophy into the words."⁶⁹

The play in its verse version (1914) follows a morality pattern which is explicitly stated in his calling it 'A Morality' by way of the sub-title of its original version. The play works as a transitional play between his Shadowy Waters plays of the first phase and Cuchulain plays of the second phase of his dramatic career. The play puts forth the conflict of two worlds that is typical to the themes of these Caltic Twilight plays. This conflict has been presented in terms of a conflict between reason and faith through the characters of a Wise Man and a Fool. While the Wise Man has been presented as a staunch supporter of reason, the Fool is portrayed as a staunch supporter of religion and firm faith in God. The Fool, hence, is a foil to the Wise Man. The Wise Man is a teacher by profession, who has inculcated in his pupils, wife and even children faith in reason. But once he is visited by an angel who predicts his death with the falling of the last grain in the Hour Glass, unless he finds within twenty four hours "...one

69. See W.B. Yeats's 'Preface' in A.N. Jafferes and A.S. Knowland, eds., of A Commentary on the Collected Plays of W.B. Yeats, p.124.

soul, before the sands have fallen, that still believes."⁷⁰
 Now the Wise Man goes out in search of such a soul but finds none. Then at last he goes to the Fool, who agrees to confess his faith, But when he does so, it is too late, because the Wise Man eventually dies. But while dying, the Wise Man does realise that:

We perish into God and sink away
 Into reality -- the rest's a dream.⁷¹

The play opens with the conversation of four pupils of the Wise Man. The stage direction is almost non-existent. The story, too, is scanty. Here we notice Shakespeare's influence on Yeats in the sense that the play's plot develops not through the comments of the author but through the dialogues of the characters along the traditional pattern of a well constituted exposition, development, climax and final resolution. The exposition of the play through the conversation of pupils introduces us to the main theme and characters of the play. Its main theme which is the conflict between reason and faith has been mentioned when the first pupil says: "There are two living countries, one visible and one invisible."⁷² The exposition leads to the development of the plot which tells us that this

70. W.B. Yeats, Collected Plays, p.310.

71. Ibid., p.322.

72. Ibid., p.301.

which tells us that this conflict has been presented through a Wise Man and a fool, upholding reason and faith respectively. A further development of the plot shows that the Wise Man is visited by an angel who declares the Wise Man's death within twenty four hours unless he finds a man with faith in God. The plot picks up a movement when the Wise Man starts his search for such a man but fails. Finally the resolution takes place with the Wise Man's death and his acceptance that God is the ultimate reality and that:

Whatso God has willed
On the instant be fulfilled,
Though that be my damnation.⁷³

Here the Wise Man shows Yeats's own realisation of the fact that one can reach or attain reality only after annihilating the self. This conviction brings to an end all the conflicts of dream and reality. this, to quote Ellis-Fermor "is a profound and live interpretation of the artist's mind."⁷⁴ While D.E.S. Maxwell says that "It is a parable of intellectual arrogance and its voluntary submission to an exalted, mystical force of this world and the 'one invisible,' separate and yet communing, divided from each

73. Ibid., p.323.

74. Una Ellis-Fermor, The Irish Dramatic Movement, p.99.

other, and, mysteriously within themselves."⁷⁵ The Wise Man perceives this philosophical truth which brings to him a sense of transcendence and ecstasy or what Yeats calls the tragic gaiety or joy resulting from suffering. This ecstasy, tragic gaiety or tragic joy has been for Yeats the hallmark of tragedy. At this moment suffering gets transformed into joy which Yeats has identified as a moment of exaltation. At this moment even death is defeated and life lies in ashes. Yeats has beautifully explained it in Lapis Lazuli as follows:

Hamlet and Lear are gay
Gaiety transcending all that dread.⁷⁶

Here, we see that though the Wise Man dies with resignation, failure and defeat, it comes close to heroic acceptance:

Be silent May God's will prevail on the instant,
Although his will be my eternal pain.⁷⁷

Yeats has explained the significance of heroic acceptance and resignation in the following lines:

Now I have given it a new end which is closer to my own
thought as well as more effective theatrically. Now I

75. D.E.S. Maxwell, Modern Irish Drama 1801-1980, p.27.

76. Peter Allt and R.K. Alspach, eds., The Variorum Edition of the Poems of W.B. Yeats, p.565.

77. W.B. Yeats, Collected Plays, p.323.

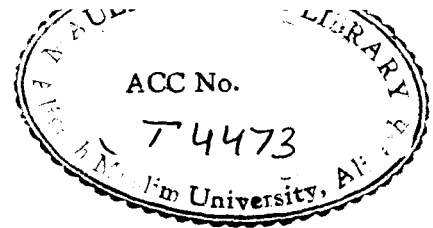
have made my philosopher accept God's will, whatever it is and find his courage again.⁷⁸

The characters of the play are the real human beings and not just shadowy figures. They possess their own distinct personalities and points of view. They are endowed with complexities. In this context Bushrui says that "Both Teigue (Fool) and the Wise Man become more complex figures in the course of these changes, the latter approaching Yeatsian heroic man."⁷⁹ These characters are of two types. One type is of real human beings who have their own ideology. They are represented by the Wise Man and the Fool. The other type is such characters as an angel and a fairy child who remain just silhouetted figures. The Wise Man even changes with the movement of the plot like the characters of the conventional plays. By the end of the play he becomes a totally different man. But these two, the Wise Man and the Fool, are also symbolic, representing two different aspects of life. The characterization undoubtedly shows Yeats's move towards the solid personalities of flesh and blood.

The verse of the play is elaborate and refined, having no such drowsiness that characterizes the preceding

78. For details see A.N. Jafferres and A.S. Knowland, eds., A Commentary on the Collected Plays of W.B. Yeats, p.120.

79. D.E.S. Maxwell and S.B. Bushrui, eds., W.B. Yeats 1865-1939: Centenary Essays on the Art of W.B. Yeats (London: Ibaden University Press, 1966), N.P.



plays. The play has a blending of prose and verse mediums in order to heighten the dramatic effect, which we find in The Shadowy Waters also. Here are to be seen pure musical notes for Yeats believed that "when one wishes to make the noise immortal and passionless as in the angel's part in The Hour Glass, one finds it desirable for the player to speak always upon pure notes, written before hand. When I heard the Angel's part spoken in this way, the contrast between the Crystalline quality of the pure notes or the more confused and passionate speaking of the Wise Man was a new dramatic effect."⁸⁰ In the words of Ernest Boyde "A timid clarity of vision is coupled with a symmetry of language, which secures the maximum poetic effect with a minimum of specific verbal ornamentation."⁸¹ The verse-version (1914) of the play also shows Yeats's wish to revive a verse-drama and his belief that "we listen more intently to verse than to prose" and that "I have got to think this (verse) necessary to lift the Wise Man's part out of slight element of platitude."⁸²

The screen designs of the play show a significant influence of Gordon Craig's art on Yeats. We see Yeats here

80. W.B. Yeats, Essays, p.174.

81. Ernest Boyde, The Contemporary Drama of Ireland (Dublin: Talbot Press, 1966), p.74.

82. See W.B. Yeats's Note to the 1922 edition of 'Plays in Prose and Verse' in Norman Jafferes and A.S.Knowland, eds., A Commentary on the Collected Plays of W.B. Yeats, p.127.

totally abandoning the traditional stage curtain under Craig's influence. This anticipates what he was to attempt later on in his Four Plays for Dancers. Here Yeats's use of the olive green stage curtains to provide full impact hints at his belief that all the elements of the costumes and curtains should conform to the total meaning of the play. Besides, the set of ivory-coloured screens that Gordon Craig provided Yeats along with a miniature model to 'play with' have been used for the first time. So it shows Yeats's rejection of the pictorial effects and preference for more austere scenes which he calls 'architectonics'. This freed Yeats's imagination because now there was no need to suggest a natural scene, the screens were frankly artificial, folded and unfolded in audience's full view. Now he tried all the experiments with the confrontation of actors and audience and the process of improvisation. He thought it to be the right direction that the experimental theatre must take in order to achieve a full synthesis of the arts. He argued that "... we painters can never give you anything except pictures, better or worse; they will never be a real setting for a drama."⁸³

Here we see Yeats's attempt to create a 'total theatre.' "He made his radical break with the naturalistic

83. See The Irish Times, 13 January 1911 in D.E.S. Maxwell, Modern Irish Drama 1891-1980, p.29.

convention, the enclosed action and the illusion of real life through this figure in Craig's costume and mask."⁸⁴ In the last scene of the play the Fool steps right out of the enclosing proscenium frame, to stand in front of the audience to address them directly. The Irish Times critics once approved that "the new arrangements served to strip away everything that would distract from the emotional and the dramatic unfolding."⁸⁵

The play's technique amply indicates Yeats's turning towards a new direction far away from the shadowy lands of the preceding plays of the first phase. But the play's theme still hovers on the conflict between the realistic, visible and the invisible underworld dramatised in the plays till now. Here this conflict is present in the context of the conflict between reason and faith. In the words of Ellis-Fermor "The Hour Glass and The Unicorn from the Stars both attempt to express in dramatic form a mystical experience which has for its culmination in the first (The Hour Glass) the words 'we perish into reality' and in the second (The Unicorn from the Stars) the words 'where there is nothing there is God.'⁸⁶ Though the play has a

84. Dennis Bablet, Edward Gordon Craig (First Published in France, 1962; translated by D. Woodward into English, 1966), pp. 122-3.

85. Katharine Worth, The Irish Drama of Europe, pp. 60-65.

86. Una Ellis-Fermor, The Irish Dramatic Movement, p.104.

systematically developed plot and shows Yeats's attempt to humanize the Wise Man, the dominant impact of the play does not relate to the issues concerning life in the worldly sense but life at a higher plane. However, Yeats succeeds here in achieving the intellectual participation of the audience in the tragic perception of the hero, arrived at through his struggle to seek truth.

CHAPTER III

PLAYS OF THE SECOND PHASE

Gradually the mood of The Shadowy Waters came to an end, which is abundantly noticeable in the preceding play, The Hour Glass. Yeats himself began to dislike his early plays and wrote that "this region of shadows is full of false images, of the spirit and of the body. I am roused by it to a kind of frenzied hatred which is out of my control."¹ Now being influenced by Synge, Yeats turned away from the dream-burdened emotions to the active will and energetic joy, and realised "a feeling for the form of life, for the moving limbs of the life, for the nobleness of life."² So, ultimately Yeats, the visionary found meaning in the life itself and returned to the people. Now drama became for him a search for more of manful energy and more of cheerful acceptance of whatever arises out of the logic of events. The themes that now he dealt with were constituted of a clash of will between two personalities. Now he no longer depicted the protagonist's desire to escape into some visionary world. This phase covers the period from 1903 to 1914. The plays that belong to this phase are -- The King's Threshold, On Baile's Strand, The Green Helmet, Deirdre, and two prose

1. W.B. Yeats, Letters to the New Island, p. 434.

2. W.B. Yeats, Explorations, p.163.

plays The Player Queen and The Unicorn from the Stars.

I

The King's Threshold

The King's Threshold (1903) is based on some old story of Ireland about the demands of the poet at the court of King Guaire. But Yeats has brought some changes in it. He has written it from the poet's point of view, which has contemporary relevance as well. Besides, the play has an archetypal import in dealing with an issue which is as wide as recorded history of literature itself. Thus the theme as shown below transcends the topical and temporal relevance, and validity.

The play dramatizes the story of a poet, namely Seanchan. This poet undertakes a fast unto death in order to demand from the King and his court, assignment of the rightful place to poets in the administration of public affairs. In spite of the request by different people to break the fast, Seanchan sticks to his resolve. The King, on the other hand, remains obstinate in his stand. At last the poet Seanchan dies and sacrifices his life for the cause of art instead of submitting to the demands of King Guaire. So, it is this clash of will, between the poet who represents the world of art and the King who represents authority, that has been dramatized here. The dramatist in

the play upholds the vindication of the ancient rights of the artist. It is relevant to mention here that during the period of the Irish struggle poets and artists were not considered very useful for the national cause. They were considered, by and large, as unrealistic dreamers. In this context the theme of the play can be said to be directly concerned with the immediate life of Ireland.

The plot of the play follows the classical pattern, as it begins at a climactic moment. The antecedent events leading to the climax have to be assumed. It is a well-known fact that Yeats, both in theory and practice, was attracted to the qualities of precision, austerity and simplicity of the Greek plays. The plot has an episodic structure. But it is not episodic in the critically pejorative sense. The episodes are intended to strengthen the climax through their cumulative import and bring out the inner strength of Seanchan's conviction and firm resolve. The different episodes of the play revolve round Seanchan. The climactic moment with which the play begins is Seanchan's resolve to fast unto death unless King Guaire agrees to all his demands for the protection of the artist's rights in the society.

The King calls Seanchan's disciples to dissuade their master from his refusal to eat or drink. The reason for

his fast is given in the King's next speech, which is an example of Yeats's handling of verse for dramatic narrative:

When he pleaded for the poets' right,
 Established at the establishment of the world,
 I said that I was the King, and that all rights
 Had their original fountain in some King,
 And that it was the men who ruled the world,
 And not the men who sang to it, who should sit
 Where there was the most honour. My Courtiers
 Bishops, soldiers, and makers of the law
 Shouted approval; and amid that noise
 Seanchan went out, and from that hour to this,
 Although there is good food and drink beside him,
 Has eaten nothing.³

The King seems to be guided by selfish interests. He is afraid of the convention that if a man dies starving upon the King's threshold "the common people, for all times to come, will raise a heavy cry against that threshold, even though it be the King's."⁴ The King is thus afraid that Seanchan's fast might bring disgrace upon him and undermine his high position among the people. He is ready to provide Seanchan everything required for a luxurious life. The opening narrative speeches of the King serve as exposition to clarify the conflict of the play.

3. W.B. Yeats, Collected Plays, p.109.

4. Ibid., p.108.

After this long narrative speech of the King the play develops through a series of episodes dealing with different visitors who come to persuade Seanchan to break his fast unto death. Here, the play is given a forward thrust. First to visit Seanchan are his two pupils -- the oldest and the youngest. Both these pupils request him not to die starving on the King's threshold. The oldest pupil says: "Yet a place at council, near the King, Is nothing of great moment Seanchan. How does so light a thing touch poetry?"⁵ The youngest pupil also argues that the world of art needs Seanchan. However, both of them fail to convince him of their views. Seanchan remains obstinately determined in his mission and declares:

When all falls
In ruin, poetry calls out in joy,
Being the scattering hand, the bursting pod,
The victim's joy among the holy flame,
God's laughter at the shattering of the world.⁶

Both the pupils go away accepting their failure: "There is nothing we can do."⁷

Next to visit the poet Seanchan are Cripples, a Mayor, and an old servant, Brian. The Mayor comes on the

5. Ibid., p.112.

6. Ibid., p.114.

7. Ibid.

stage "muttering chief poet," 'Ireland,' etc., Brian takes food out of a basket. The Mayor has "an ogham stick in his hand."⁸ They all plead with him to break his fast but they also fail in their attempt and Seanchan goes on insisting on the restoration of the poet's ancient right before he would listen to them. This episode ends with physical injury done to the Mayor by Brian. This episode highlights the dramatist's belief that humanity is represented by such lowly people of society as the tramps and beggars. Here, we see how these Cripples have great reverence for Seanchan. They also realise the great power of poetry. For them Seanchan suggests a semi-Druidical figure and for them "there is something queer about a man that makes rhymes" and "those that make rhymes have power far beyond the world."⁹ So they are in sharp contrast to the Mayor both physically and mentally because for the latter the King represents the supreme authority on earth and Seanchan's issue is of no great significance. Brian also supports Seanchan and curses the King :

And nobody will sing for him;
 And nobody will pray for him,
 But ever and always curse him and abuse him.¹⁰

8. Ibid., p.115.

9. Ibid.

10. Ibid., p.120.

After them, appear two ladies on the stage, who have been hired by the Lord High Chamberlain for the same purpose. Their entry is followed by an argument between Seanchan and Chamberlain. Here Chamberlain offers him food and says "There is none but holds you in respect."¹¹ But Seanchan is firm in his decision to lie down upon the threshold till the King restores the ancient rights of the poets. The young girls come again but Seanchan says: "Go from me? Here is nothing for your eyes."¹²

After this, two young princesses come on the state with a dish and a cup of wine and ask Seanchan to eat and drink. But Seanchan refusing their proposal says that their hands are contaminated and that they are lepers. Then Seanchan "flings the contents of the cup in their faces."¹³ The next visitor is Seanchan's beloved Fedelm who, on the Mayor's request, asks Seanchan to "come home with me. You have need of rest and care."¹⁴ Now Seanchan agrees to have bread and wine which Fedelm offers him but soon he overcomes his sentiments and thrusts it back into her hand. Fedelm pleads to him to eat the bread for her sake and says:

11. Ibid., p. 126.

12. Ibid., p. 130.

13. Ibid., p. 132.

14. Ibid., p. 135.

You do not know what love is; for if you loved
 You would put every other thought away.
 But you have never loved me.¹⁵

Seanchan refuses to be moved by his love's sentimental taunts and declares:

Go where you will,
 So it be out of sight and out of mind
 I cast you from me like an old torn cap.¹⁶

But, as soon as Fedelm bursts into tears Seanchan takes her in his arms and kisses her explaining her:

If I had eaten when you bid me, sweetheart,
 The kiss of multitudes in times to come had been the
 poorer.¹⁷

This episode between Seanchan and Fedelm has human elements in it. Indeed Fedelm wants to save Seanchan not because the King has asked her to do so but because of her own love for Seanchan. This episode shows Seanchan's deep anguish in his sacrifice of his love for his ideal.

At last the King personally comes to persuade Seanchan to break his fast and claims his love for Seanchan. But Seanchan pushes away the food brought by the King for him. This makes the King angry and lose his patience. Now

15. Ibid., p.138.

16. Ibid.

17. Ibid., p.139.

King Guaire threatens Seanchan of death alongwith his two pupils. Consequently these two pupils also cry out: "Die, Seanchan, and proclaim the right of the poets."¹⁸ But Seanchan refuses their help and then dies saying:

He needs no help that joy has lifted up
Like some miraculous beast out of Ezekiel.¹⁹

In Seanchan's death lies his victory and the King's defeat. In fact Seanchan instead of bowing down to the King's demands, dies starving on the King's threshold with the firm belief that

When I and these are dead
We should be carried to some windy hill
To lie there with uncovered face awhile
That markind and that leper there may know
dead faces laugh. 20

Seanchan's brave response to death makes him heroic and exalts his soul. This exaltation makes him burst out into Yeatsian tragic gaiety as the following lines imply:

When all falls
In ruin, poetry calls out in joy,
Being the scattering hand, the bursting pod,
The victim's joy among the holy flame,²¹

This is Yeats's concept of tragic joy, which for him was the

18. Ibid., p.140.

19. Ibid., p.141.

20. Ibid.

21. Ibid., p.114.

hallmark of tragedy.

Here we can pause for a moment to comment on the episodic structural pattern of the play, within the framework of austere and classical construction. So far as the development of the action is concerned, the dramatist has shown no interest in the conventional progressive construction of the plot. The focal thematic and structural point is monolithically static. In order to present the firm resolve of Seanchan, the climactic point in the action, the dramatist has presented, through controlled austerity, a series of temptations in the form of persuasions. These temptations are at an ascending scale of expected efficacy. Yeats, however, has devoted considerable space to the sentimental temptation in the form of the poet's love. This does not bring a false note in the dramatic composition because Seanchan gets humanized for a moment through this episode. The chief conflict between art and civil authority has been concluded by the appearance of the King as the last in the series of temptations confronting Seanchan. Seanchan has been placed in the centre both at the symbolic plane and at the plane of events taking place in the drama. He thus becomes the flaming soul to burn the antagonistic elements by vanquishing them and to vitalize those elements which have potential of being energized. For instance all those

who are on the King's and Court's side constitute the antagonistic elements and are rejected. The pupils and to some extent Seanchan's beloved who are capable of perceiving the significance of Seanchan's idealism waver back to the poet's cause. Thus the poet through his physical death acquires a victory at a high plane. The King and all his authority and manipulations fail to win over Seanchan to their negative attitude to art and the artist's place in society. The play dramatizes not the vague desires of Shadowy waters but the clash of will between two realistic forces. The clash takes place in the real world. Yeats now came to realise that "any knot of events where there is passionate emotion and clash of will, can be made the subject matter of a play"²² Now criticising his earlier Celtic Twilight plays Yeats said: "Let us have no emotion, however abstract, in which there is no athletic joy."²³ The present play amply illustrates this concept of Yeats. Rajan also thinks so and says that Yeats now came to realise the bareness of this region of twilight. He prepared "his mind for that new alignment of forces that was to make possible the poetry of the whole man."²⁴ In The King's Threshold we see Yeats feeling the tumult of life itself

22. Quoted in B. Rajan's W.B. Yeats: A Critical Introduction, p.151.

23. W.B. Yeats, Letters, pp.434-5.

24. B.Rajan, W.B. Yeats: A Critical Introduction, p.39.

under the influence of Synge. It is based on his belief that "there (exists) in Ireland an energy of thought about life itself, a vivid sensitiveness as to the reality of things, powerful enough to overcome all the phantoms of night. Everything calls up its contrary, unreality calls up reality."²⁵

The play is Yeats's first and the only play that shows Yeats's inner urge for the restoration of the poetic world. Here this has been depicted through Seanchan, the poet through whom Yeats declares his own views that poetry is either the root of life or it is nothing. In this regard Ellis-Fermor remarks that the play "is the apocalyptic vision of the function of poetry, through poetry something breaks in upon life. There can be no compromise between it and the world.... The play is the highest poetic expression of this faith. Its challenge lies in the dramatization of this faith."²⁶

The characters of the play are real human beings. They are not shadowy figures as in his Celtic twilight plays. In fact the King, the poet, the Mayor, all are common figures that exist in every society. Though King Guaire and Seanchan have been presented as representing

25. See A.N. Jafferes and K.G.W. Cross, eds., In Excited Reverie (London: Macmillan, 1965), p.63.

26. Una Ellis-Fermor, The Irish Dramatic Movement, p.94.

authority and art respectively, they are real humans also having their own mental and physical outlook. The opening speeches of the King amply show human emotions guiding him. Seanchan's conversation with his beloved also shows human emotions and passions.

The diction of the play shows Yeats's move from dialogue to ritual incantation. This we see in the chant of the Mayor, the Cripples and Brian.²⁷ This also shows Yeats's delight in lively prose speech, his drawing on the source of vitality in Irish country-speech from which Synge was drawing his comedies.

The play shows Yeats's attempt to establish the supremacy of the word, the music, and the song over external action. However, the play professedly being a thesis play, does show a diminution of human emotions and feelings that contribute to the immediate dramatic appeal of the play. The thesis that art occupies as important a place in society as authority transcends the temporal and topical boundaries and thus makes the play endowed with universal relevance.

II

On Baile's Strand

On Baile's Strand (1904) again dramatizes the conflict that

27. See Raymond William's Drama from Ibsen to Brecht (London: Chatto and Windus, 1954), p.122.

Yeats had depicted in The King's Threshold and in his later plays. This is the conflict between the strong hero and a guileful, ruthless ruler who defeats him either in the guise of Guaire, Bricrui or Conchubar. The present play depicts the conflict between the King Conchubar and the warrior hero Cuchulain. This is the first of Yeats's five plays dramatizing the Cuchulain myth. These plays form a kind of cycle of Cuchulain plays where Yeats has attempted to popularize Irish legends in order to fulfill his dream of a national theatre of Ireland. Cuchulain, the hero of these plays, was a personage of symbolic significance to the Irish Nationalist Movement.

Yeats was greatly fascinated by the heroic figures in Irish saga and legend. He said "when we remember the majesty of Cuchulain and beauty of sorrowing Deirdre we should not forget that it is that majesty and beauty which is immortal."²⁸ Yeats here, casting aside the story of the Great Celtic Reid of Coolney, focusses on Cuchulain's killing of his own son and his subsequent fight with the sea. It is thus the dramatization of an intense moment in the emotional life of Cuchulain.

The plot of the play is based on 'The only son of Aoife,' an episode in Lady Gregory's Cuchulain of Muirthemne.

28. W.B. Yeats, Uncollected Prose 1, p.265.

The play depicts how Cuchulain unknowingly kills his own son and how after realising the horrible reality, he goes mad and fights vainly with the sea waves. The play structurally combines the techniques of a conventional play and of Greek drama. It makes use of a pair of characters -- a Blind man and a Fool -- who are complementary to each-other and act as a chorus. Besides their choric function, they also represent the harsh reality of existence. This is conveyed in a non-serious strain in their discussing a plan for a dinner to satisfy their hunger. This strain of the plot acts as a foil to the main plot. Contrasted with their mundane concern of living at the physical plane is the heroic concern of the protagonist of the main action. In their opening situation they introduce us to the chief characters of the main plot -- Conchubar and Cuchulain. They also narrate the events and situation antecedent to the actual dramatic action of the play. The antecedent story gives out, with precision, the account of a Young Man who has come to fight with Cuchulain. The relationship between the Young Man and Cuchulain is known only to the Blind Man who symbolically acts as an omniscient observer.²⁹ Here Yeats has intentionally withheld the details of the Young Man's parents for the sake of curiosity and suspense. Thus

29. W.B. Yeats, Collected Plays, p.251.

the Blind Man operates at two levels; at one level he is a dramatic personae in the apparently lowly action of the play. But, on the other level, he acts as the omniscient seer in the manner of Eliot's Tiresius in The Waste-Land. After this, the Fool sings a traditional song about the fights of Cuchulain in which Cuchulain is presented as a semi-divine hero. He also narrates in the song the supernatural exploits of Cuchulain as described in the old sagas. The Blind Man tells how Cuchulain defeated the women warriors of Aoife's country of which he (Blind Man) was an eye witness.

The dramatist after completing the information required for the exposition brings on the stage the main participants of the action -- Cuchulain and Conchubar. Conchubar and Cuchulain talk about the oath of fealty. Conchubar has called upon Cuchulain because of the landing of a Young Man from Aoife's country on a shore, left ill-guarded by the latter. For Cuchulain the Young Man's landing does not pose any danger. He asserts:

I that in early days have driven out
 Meave of Cruachan and the Northern pirates
 Out of the garden in the East of the world,
 Must I, that held you on the throne when all
 Had pulled you from it, swear obedience
 As if I were some cattle-raising King.³⁰

30. Ibid., p.255.

It is this oath of fealty that eventually ruins Cuchulain and constitutes the central irony of the play. Then Conchubar hints at Cuchulain's childless state. The ensuing conversation mentions Cuchulain's affair with a fierce woman in Scotland to whom he bore a son. Ironically the physical characteristics symbolically hint at their status and authority. The irony is that the son's identity, in the context of the imminent threat of the young man, is known neither to Cuchulain nor to Conchubar. The theme of the individual will and its surrender to a higher will has been completed by Cuchulain's unequivocal surrender of his will to that of the royal demand.

After this, the conversation between Cuchulain and Conchubar takes up another transcendental issue which Yeats has presented in A Vision. This is the complementation of two traits to constitute one perfect personality:

You are but half a King and I but half;
I need your might of hand and burning heart,
And you my wisdom.³¹

Having prepared the audience for the main action to take place through the readiness of Cuchulain to follow the King's advice, the stage action begins. There is a loud knocking at the door and the cry of 'open-open' is heard.

31. Ibid., p.260.

Soon the third woman opens the door and a Young Man with a drawn sword enters. In his argument with Cuchulain he says that he has come to weigh his sword against Cuchulain's sword. Young Man does not tell his name, because of his being under bonds. But he tells something about his parentage. He says that he too is of that ancient seed "and carry the signs about his body and in his bones."³² Cuchulain identifies in his hawk like nature the signs of nobility. Now he takes him into the light and notices his strong resemblance to Aoife, but dismisses this reality saying:

You are from the North

Where there are many that have that tint of hair.³³

Then Cuchulain compares his arms with that of the Young Man's and says:

That arm had a good father and a mother,
But it is not like this.³⁴

The Young Man's fierceness and his combination of his father's heart and mother's eye fascinate Cuchulain so much that instead of fighting with him he wants to be his friend now. The reason being that the Young Man's physique reminds Cuchulain of his own earlier ecstatic life of a shape-changer. He recalling those times says:

32. Ibid., p.265.

33. Ibid.

34. Ibid., p.266.

He has got her fierceness,
 And nobody is so fierce as those pale women.
 But I will keep him with me, Conchubar,
 That he may set my memory upon her.³⁵

Cuchulain now forgets about his oath. The Young Man too is fascinated by Cuchulain's intimate tone and he extends his friendship to him. Now Cuchulain initiates an exchange of gifts so that his fight with the Young Man is averted. He says:

I will give you gifts,
 But I'd have something too- that arm-ring boy.
 We'll have this quarrel out when you are older.³⁶

The gift given to the Young Man is a cloak, which Cuchulain got from his father as a gift in a battle-field. This is a sort of a token for the recognition of parentage. Now the King's entourage, who have been watching all this think that Cuchulain is under the spell of some witches. But Cuchulain denies this. He says that this is because the Young Man's head resembles a woman's head which he craved for. Here again Cuchulain's inner urge for a boy is seen in the following lines which he uttered while asleep:

35. Ibid.

36. Ibid., p.267.

Boy, I would them all in arms
 If I'd a son like you. He would avenge me
 When I have withstood for the last time the men
 Whose fathers, brothers, sons, and friends I have killed
 Upholding Conchubar.³⁷

Now Conchubar unable to withstand all this any more intervenes: "No more of this I will not have this friendship."³⁸ This makes Cuchulain angry and he remains obstinate in his decision. He becomes impatient and even seizes Conchubar "I will hold you there high-King."³⁹ Immediately as he attacks the high King he gets disturbed and scared of the witchcraft that he thinks has seized him now. He now blames the Young Man for all that has happened to him. The latter being shocked by this sudden change of Cuchulain denies this charge against him. However, Cuchulain now is prepared to fight with him.

After this, we see them in the battle-field on the strand. The commentary of their fight is given by three unidentified women. Two of them are shown wailing on the threshold. This suggests the Young Man's death by his own father. We see Cuchulain taking a handful of feathers out of a heap, the fool has on the bench beside him, and wiping the blood off his sword with these feathers. In the

37. Ibid., p.269.

38. Ibid., p.270.

39. Ibid.

following conversation between Cuchulain and the Blind Man the truth that Cuchulain has killed his son is revealed. The Blind Man tells the Fool: "It is his own son he has slain."⁴⁰ This reminds Cuchulain of his past life. Cuchulain in this conversation also comes to know that Conchubar deliberately made Cuchulain fight with his own son. Now Cuchulain's anger becomes boundless, slanting against the King's chair he calls him "A Maggot that is eating up the earth."⁴¹ The last scene in which Cuchulain is shown fighting the sea-waves till they sweep him away to the unknown place is described by the Blind Man and the Fool. This fighting implies Cuchulain's fighting against his fate but in vain. At this state of anguish Cuchulain seems to belong to phase 12 -- the hero's crescent described by Yeats in his A Vision.⁴² This illustrates Yeats's concept of life as a war of two opposites-- will and mask -- creative mind and body of fate. The play ends with what Milton has said: Calm of mind, all passion spent.

The play is rooted in perceivable reality and not in the vagueness and mysteries of the Shadowy Water plays. Its thematic structure consists of the conflict between two types of values represented by Conchubar, the King, and Cuchulain, a warrior. Conchubar wants to secure his

40. Ibid., p.276.

41. Ibid., p.277.

42. See W.B. Yeats, A Vision, (London : Macmillan and Co.1962; New York: Macmillan and Co. 1961), p.178-9.

Elizabethan and Irish elements. The theme is obviously from Irish legend but it is infomed with Yeats's philosophy of the cyclical nature of human personality explicitly stated in A Vision. The play is Greek in its deft use of chorus which in a subtle manner is also a participant in the action. In fact it is the Blind Man who precipitates the catastrophe in Cuchulain's mind by telling him the truth about the young man he has killed. It is Elizabethan in its use of sub-plot, which through parallelism and contrast highlights the piognancy of the concerns of the main plot. There is greater solidity of characterization in human terms and its symbolism is highly selective and unobstrusive. The Language by and large is characterized by a colloquial rhythmic flow. The verse of the play, though transparent, is not yet shorn off the desirable superfluties which Yeats proposed. Thus there is obvious discrepency between his theory and practice, because the play is not aimed at intellectual excitement so much as at an emotional appeal. Besides, Yeats avoided what he proposed to achieve: a stark verse where each word stands for an image.

III

Deirdre

Deirdre (1906) is a further advance in the direction followed by The King's Threshold and On Baile's Strand, i.e. to deal with human emotions rather than abstract ideas.

allegiance to ensure prosperity of his house and country. But Cuchulain glories in the life of turbulence. A parallel conflict is also present in the Blind Man and the Fool. The former has good sense, practical intelligence, and the latter has imagination and things of spirit. Then the play also puts forth the conflict between the heroic and actual life, the fate that can neither change a man nor can it be changed by man -- the aspects that Yeats has dealt with in his later plays. The play shows Yeats's attempt to "rediscover an art of theatre that shall be joyous, extravagant, whimsical, beautiful, resonant and altogether reckless."⁴³ Besides, we see here an internal conflict also. This is between the two sides of one's own self: the wild, instinctive and restless side of man's nature, and the cautious, hearth-loving controlled side. The play also illustrates Yeats's concept of tragedy and tragic irony. Tragic irony is seen in the fact that Cuchulain in his inner heart has a craving for a son, whom he so violently repudiates and eventually stabs to death.

Here Yeats has certainly made an advance over the plays we have analysed earlier. On Baile's Strand is a greater success than the plays written by Yeats so far. The play demonstrates Yeats's efforts to combine Greek,

43. Quoted in B. Rajan's, W.B. Yeats: A Critical Introduction, p.59.

Structurally this is the best constructed of Yeats's plays. By now he had fully developed his own theory of drama, which he has explained in detail in his essay, "The Tragic Theatre." But as early as 1903, he, in his essay "The Reforms of the Theatre," talked of reforming the theatre in its acting, speaking, scenery etc., in a way that all these contribute to presenting beauty and truth and making theatre a place of intellectual excitement. Language was also to be appropriate, and acting simple, having such gestures as would be the accompaniment of acting and not its rival. Even scenery and costume, like background to a portrait had to contribute to the total effect. In 1904, his essay, "First Principles," further elaborated this theory, according to which all things that drew attention away from "few moments of intense expression... whether through the voice or through the hands,"⁴⁴ were to be excluded. Yeats aimed at the moment of intense life where "An action is taken out of all other actions; it is reduced to its simplest form,.... The characters involved... are free from everything that is not the part of that action,... and whether it is a mere bodily activity or an activity of the soul of character, it is an energy, an eddy of life purified from everything but itself."⁴⁵

44. W.B. Yeats, Essays, p.109.

45. W.B. Yeats, Essays and Introductions, p.241.

The essay on "The Tragic Theatre" focusses on Yeats's rejection of naturalistic drama wherein the dramatic moment consists in the contest of character with character, and shows his preference for that drama of great ages in which character grows less and sometimes disappears, and is replaced by a lyric intensity of 'rhythm, balance, patterns, images,' etc. This was so because for Yeats character is important in comedy. In tragedy character is replaced by the passions and motives like those of Racine's and Corneille's tragedies. Yeats thus defines tragedy as "the drowning and breaking of the dykes that separate man from man."⁴⁶ He sought passionate art in which "passions on the stage greden until they are humanity itself."⁴⁷ This essay reaches its climax 'with the images of collapsing dykes letting in the flood of anima-mundi and stating 'that tragic art... moves us by setting us to reverie, by alluring us almost to the intensity of trance.'⁴⁸

Deirdre exemplifies Yeats's concept of tragedy. Here a moment of intense life where "everything concentrates on the way single heroic individual confronts her destiny,"⁴⁹ has been dramatized. The legend on which the play is based is perhaps the most famous of all Irish legends, the best

46. Ibid., p.255.

47. Ibid.

48. Ibid., p.239.

49. Peter Ure, Yeats the Playwright (London: Macmillan, 1960), p.47.

version of which is Lady Gregory's Cuchulain of Muirthemne. Various other old versions of the story are also available. Yeats has stated his dramaturgical strategy in regard to the selection of details in the various versions of the story: "All these texts differ more or less,... I have selected certain things which seem to be characteristic of the tale as well as in themselves dramatic, and I have separated these from much that needed an epic form or a more elaborate treatment."⁵⁰

The Deirdre legend had already been exploited by A.E. and Synge but Yeats's treatment is different from theirs. Yeats's canvas is deliberately small and more concentrated which "avoids the climax from the inessentials of the story of conflict."⁵¹ Yeats starts the play at its climax, when Deirdre and her lover, Naoise, after wandering for years, decide to return to their King. The play deals with a story of a young girl child, brought up by the witch under King Conchubar's supervision, who later on wants to marry her. At this she [Deirdre] elopes with Naoise, just before her wedding with the King. These two lovers wander for six years, then eventually decide to return because the King

50. See W.B. Yeats, 'The Arrow' in Russell K. Alspach, ed., The Variorum Plays of W.B. Yeats, p.389.

51. Anniah Gowda, A Revival of English Poetic Drama (Bangalore: The Government Press, 1963), p.300.

has promised to forgive them. But as they return they are taken captive by the King and Naoise is killed also, so that the King might marry Deirdre. Now Deirdre, becoming aware of the King's evil designs, kills herself. Thus she gets united with her lover for ever. The play begins with the Musician's prologue. The First Musician Says:

I have a story right, my wanderers,
That has so mixed with fable in our songs.
That all seem fabulous, we are come by chance,
Into King Conchubar's country, and his house
And there Queen Deirdre grew.⁵²

The Second Musician extends the narrative:

That famous Queen who has been wandering
With her lover Noaise.⁵³

The First Musician now reveals the whole story:

Some dozen years ago, King Conchubar found
A child with an old witch to nurse her,
Of who she was or why she was hidden there,
He went up thither daily, till at last
She put up womanhood, and he lost peace,
And Deirdre's tale began. The King was old.
A month or so before the marriage day,
A young man, Naoise, son of Usna, climbed up there,
And having wooed, or as some say, been wooed
Carried her off.⁵⁴

52. W.B. Yeats, Collected Plays, p.171.

53. Ibid., p.172.

54. Ibid.

So the Musicians by way of exposition have narrated, in short, the entire past story of Deirdre. The play comes into action with the entry of Fergus, "an old man, moving about from door to window excitedly through what follows."⁵⁵ He informs us that the two lovers, just mentioned by the Musicians as wandering, have been forgiven by King Conchubar and soon they are arriving. So Fergus asks these Musicians to play a happy music that pleases Naoise. But the First Musician foresees some treachery in it and says:

An old man's love
Who casts no second line is hard to cure;
His jealousy is like his love.⁵⁶

This treachery is suggested here by means of a dark man with murderous and outlandish looks moving in the background. Soon the mood changes as the lively music of the lyric song announces Deirdre's and Naoise's entrance. As soon as Deirdre enters the court she also suspects some conspiracy against her because she finds the room vacant. She asks the Musicians to stop their song. The First Musician also hints at some evil device on the King's part and wants to make Deirdre also realise this:

55. Ibid., p.173.

56. Ibid., p.174.

I have heard he loved you
 As some old miser loves the dragon-stone
 He hides among the Cobwebs near the roof.

He means to say explains Deirdre:

That when a man who has loved like that
 Is after crossed, love drowns in its own flood,
 And that love drowned and floating is but hate;
 And that a King who hates sleeps ill at night
 Till he has killed; and though the day laughs.
 We shall be dead at cock-crow.⁵⁸

Deirdre thinks that the Musician prophetically hints at their death at the cock-crow. The First Musician goes on to elaborate his apprehension:

You have not my thought
 When I lost one that I loved distractedly,
 I blamed my crafty rival and not him.⁵⁹

Now Deirdre guesses the reality that the King will kill Noaise and keep her alive. The First Musician also mentions a bridal bed in Conchubar's house and the expected arrival of a bride in his house. This increases Deirdre's suspicions. She even calls Naoise, who remains cool. She tells him about King Conchubar's passion for her. At this news Naoise says "we will to the horses and take ship again."⁶⁰ Fergus, who has a different perception of the

57. Ibid., p.182.

58. Ibid.

59. Ibid.

60. Ibid., p.186.

reality, calls Naoise a fool and threatens the couple:

.... but if you fly
King Conchubar may think that he is mocked
And the house blaze again.⁶¹

Deirdre's argument is that they can be saved only if she spoils her beauty. She wishes that the creatures of the wood could tear her body with their claws so that the past enmity of Conchubar with her and Naoise ends for ever.

Afterwards a dark-faced messenger comes to the threshold and announces that:

Deirdre and Fergus, son of Rogh, are summoned;
But not the traitor that bore off the Queen.⁶²

The news that Naoise is not invited by the King and is declared as a traitor shocks Naoise very much. He calls it the King's treachery and challenges the King to match him there or anywhere else. Fergus, too, feels betrayed and promises to save them at any cost.

My name has still some power, I will protect,
Or, if impossible, revenge.⁶³

Now the King comes on the stage with a dark-faced

61. Ibid.

62. Ibid., p.187.

63. Ibid., p.189.

man. Naoise thinks that Conchubar has accepted his challenge, but the First Musician tells him that King Conchubar has come to spy upon Naoise. The two lovers are then trapped and are now at the King's mercy. This plight of these lovers further strengthens their bonds of love. Naoise is entangled in a net like a helpless bird and would be released only if Deirdre agrees to marry the King. Now Deirdre thinks that in order to save her lover's life it is better to go with the King. But Naoise asks her not to do so and says:

And do you think that, were I given
 Life at such a price, I would not cast it from me
 O'my eagle! if you were to do this thing,
 Love's law being broken, I would stand alone.⁶⁴

Deirdre appeals to the King for the release of Naoise. In the mean time Naoise is killed on the King's orders. Deirdre being dragged away fails to notice this. She comes to know of it when the executioner with a blood-stained sword comes to inform Deirdre of Naoise's killing by him. Deirdre bravely overcomes her grief and plans a device according to which she simulates affection for the King and makes an excuse to have a last look at Naoise's dead body. On this pretext she goes behind the curtains and kills herself in

64. Ibid., pp.197-7.

order to be united with Naoise for ever. The Musicians now sing the following song:

They are gone. The proud may lie by the proud
Into the secret wilderness of their love
Eagles have gone into their cloudy bed.⁶⁵

As the song ends Fergus enters and tells:

King, she is dead, but lay no hand upon her.⁶⁶

The play comes to an end with the loud shouts outside:
"Death to Conchubar."⁶⁷

Thus we see that Deirdre's character seems to come closer to Yeats's ideal tragic character who greatens till he is humanity itself. She attains heroism casting aside everybody else in the background. This is seen in the scene after the death of Naoise, wherein Deirdre skilfully overpowers her grief and befools the King by killing herself behind the curtains on the pretext of having a last look at her lover. In regard to Deirdre's heroism Yeats said that "I [Yeats] was moved because the words have called up before me the image of a sea-born woman so distinctly that Deirdre seems by contrast to those unshaken eyelids that had but the

65. Ibid., pp.201-2.

66. Ibid., p.202.

67. Ibid., p.203.

sea's cold blood what I have wished her to seem, a wild bird in a cage."⁶⁸ In fact, she, unlike the earlier shadowy figures, is a being of blood and flesh, having human emotions that are born from the natural element in the epic literature of Gaelic Ireland. Deirdre here is presented as aware of the future events. She wants to face her death differently from Naoise's, who dies while entrapped. She rather creates her own way of dying "a good end to the long cloudy day."⁶⁹ The play conforms to Yeats's concept of "An imaginative delight in the energetic character (that) enlarges the energy of man by the spectacle of energy."⁷⁰

The play conforms to Yeats's belief that "the subject of art is passion (which) can only be contemplated when purified of all but itself and aroused into perfect intensity by opposition with some other passion."⁷¹ Here the opposing passions are love and jealousy. Here is seen Yeats's view that tragedy consists in the moments of exaltation, excitement, as seen here in the act of Deirdre's killing herself, which lifts her above the common level.

As regards the theme, the play conforms to Yeats's theory that "the common heart will always love better the

68. W.B. Yeats's Preface to the 'Plays for an Irish Theatre,' in Chaturvedi, Twentieth Century Poetic Drama (Gwalior : Kitabghar, 1961), p.17.

69. W.B. Yeats, Collected Plays, p.191.

70. W.B. Yeats, Plays and Controversies, p.15.

71. Ibid., p.105.

tales that have something of old wives tale."⁷² Here the theme is archetypal i.e., two men loving one woman: "one woman and two men; that is the quarrel/That knows no mending."⁷³ The play's theme shows that Yeats at this time considered a play as something vital and passionate, without being sentimental. This shows Yeats's realisation of "a feeling for the forms of life, for the moving limbs of life, for the nobleness of life."⁷⁴

Regarding the play's technical excellence Yeats expressed his own satisfaction thus: "... I had put all my knowledge into it and could not look for greater pleasure than it had already given me."⁷⁵ The scenery of the play is based on Mr. Craig's scenic designs that fully conform to the action and the mood of the play, besides providing it expressive and natural lights. Its stage conforms to Yeats's ideal stage equipped with screens and lighting devices that Craig provided him.

The play's diction and versification show a further development of Yeats's dramaturgy. The verses are fine poetry, both simple and natural. This corresponds to his

72. W.B. Yeats, Ideas of Good and Evil, pp.336-7.

73. W.B. Yeats, Collected Plays, p.194.

74. W.B. Yeats, Explorations, p.163.

75. Russel K. Alspach, ed., The Variorum Edition of the plays of W.B. Yeats, p.396.

desire to use such a verse as to disturb neither the rhythm of poetic line nor the naturalness and audability of words: "where, one requires the full attention of the mind, one must not weary it with any but the most needful changes of the pitch and note..."⁷⁶ was Yeats's ideal. Its language accords with his dislike of modern musician's manner "who through the over-development of an art writes so many notes for every word that the natural energy of the speech is dissolved, broken, and the words made inaudible."⁷⁷

Here, Yeats has emphasized human interest by reducing the symbolic implications of the characters to the minimum. But the King can be taken to be symbolic of authority trying to thwart genuine woman's passion. Hence its conflict, though external, acquires symbolic significance also. The King seems to represent all tyranny, conspiracy and betrayal that constitute authority. Nevertheless his character has been humanised by the intensity of passion that he possesses. In fact his passion is archetypal, hopeless longing of the age for the love of the youth. Yeats calls the play "most powerful and even sensational."⁷⁸

76. W.B. Yeats, Explorations, p.172.

77. W.B. Yeats, Essays and Introductions, p.18.

78. W.B. Yeats, Letters, p.482.

IV

The Green Helmet

The Green Helmet, Yeats's one of the five Cuchulain plays, appeared in 1910 in its verse version. Its prose version, entitled The Golden Helmet, had appeared in 1908. The play according to Yeats "is based on an old Irish story 'The Feast of Bricrui' in Lady Gregory's Cuchulain of Muirthemne, and is meant as an introduction to One Baile's Strand."⁷⁹ Here Yeats has combined two episodes from this story - one is 'the war of the words of the women of Ulster' and the other, 'The Championship of ulster.' The dramatist has also changed the form and the mood of this story and made it more compressed by combining the figures of Bricrui and Curoi in the figure of 'Red Man' in this play.

The play's story deals with the heroic exploits of Cuhulain, its hero. Here Cuchulain is shown as ready to accept the challenge of Red Man (a spirit) who has come from the country under wave. Red Man has been depicted here as fond of making mischieves. He thus gets involved in a game of head-for-head with two other champions of Ulster, namely Congall and Laegaire. But Congall and Laegaire, finding that this Red gaint is ready to be beheaded without suffering any harm, become frightened of him and refuse to give their head

79. W.B. Yeats, Collected Works, IV.

as was the condition of the accord. Now Cuchulain accepts this challenge. Red Man is so pleased with his bravery that in the end he makes Cuchulain the champion of this land.

The play is written as a heroic farce in irregular metres. Yeats has used this form of heroic farce for the first-time. This form is best suited to the dramatization of the reckless courage of Cuchulain and his heroic exploits. Yeats has handled this form with a remarkable skill. This form shows his experimental nature. Yeats seems to have intentionally shaped the play into the modern sphere of a surrealistic farce.

The action of the play takes place in a house made of logs with spectacular setting; "The chairs, tables and flagons black, with a slight purple tinge which is not clearly distinguishable from the black...."⁸⁰ Here we have two kinds of people: Black Man and Red Man. The play begins with the conversation of Laegaire and Conall which establishes the comic atmosphere of the play. In this conversation these two characters boast of their triumphant adventures, while referring to a warrior, Cuchulain, and his wife. Laegaire tells Conall of "a cat-headed man out of Connacht [who] go pacing and spitting by."⁸¹ Conall now boastfully says:

80. W.B. Yeats, Collected Plays, p.223.

81. Ibid., p.224.

You have dreamed it-there is nothing out there.

I killed them all before day break- I hooked them out of
their lair;

I cut off a hundred heads with a single stroke of my
sword,

Then I danced on their graves and carried away their hoard⁸²

Here these two characters also refer to Cuchulain as "A man in a long green cloak that covers him upto the chin."⁸³ So Cuchulain is introduced as a young man. Soon Laegaire recognises this young man as Cuchulain. Then we have a long discussion between Cuchulain and these two characters. Here Cuchulain's confidence of his strength and might is seen when he says "I will eat and sleep where I will."⁸⁴ Then Conall and Laegaire tell Cuchulain of their adventures, how Red Man's head was cut off and put back again. They also tell Cuchulain about their accord with Red Man according to which the heads of Conall and Laegaire were to be cut off. But the latter being scared of the former went back upon their promise and now they say:

If you (Cuchulain) had been sitting there you had been
silent like us.

How can you fight with a head that laughs when

You have whipped it off?

Or a man that can pick it up and carry it out in his
hand.⁸⁵

82. Ibid.

83. Ibid., p.225.

84. Ibid., p.226.

85. Ibid., pp.230-31.

Here, Cuchulain's intervening comments again confirm his courage. For instance, he says:

We will drive him out with the sword,
And take his life in the bargain if but dare to scoff.
Find that old Juggler Manannan and whip his head away.⁸⁶

It is here that Cuchulain discloses that: "I am Sualtim's son Cuchulain."⁸⁷

Now Red Man referred to above comes personally on the stage. He is "a tall, red-headed, red-cloaked man standing upon the threshold against the misty green of the sea, making him seem taller even than he is."⁸⁸ He introduces himself thus:

For I am the drinker's friend,
The kindest of all shape-changers from here to the
world's end,
The best of all tipsy companions.⁸⁹

Red Man now proposes Cuchulain to take the ale: "Let the bravest take it up,"⁹⁰ he says. Red Man leaves the stage. And soon the sounds of stable boys, charioteers and scullions coming are heard along with Emer's cry for Cuchulain pleading him to put off sloth and love her. This is followed by Red Man's re-entry declaring:

86. Ibid., p.231.

87. Ibid.

88. Ibid.

89. Ibid., p.232.

90. Ibid., p.233.

and places the Helmet on his head. Moore comments aptly on Cuchulain's heroism, which is the concern of the play, in the following words :

Cuchlain is a match for the Red man not because he could defeat him in an epic-battle, but because his confidence in his own destiny is so great that he can afford to be careles of his life, he is the central authority, for a triumphant moment anyway. . The uncrowned King is actually crowned; the hero in a public ceremony receives divine emotion.⁹⁶

Inherent in this story of Cuchulain's courageous war with Red Man and his final victory is Yeats's philosophy of A Vision that deals with the cyclical movement of human soul, which is to be found in his five Cuchulain plays. The wheel symbol here has 28 phases of the moon that make the human soul move alternately between the objective and subjective gyres. This is in conformity both with the occult doctrines and beliefs of Irish peasantry. It also has affinities with the ritual system of primitive men and of Golden Dawn Society. In this way the play is a ritual for the winter solstice -- a ritual celebration held at the lower point of Sun God's power. Here we see that Cuchulain, the sun hero, fights the forces of darkness, and only when he has happily submitted to the supreme test,

96. J.R. Moore, Masks of Love and Death: Yeats as a Dramatist (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1971), p.158.

giving his whole for the total extinction of the forces of darkness, that he attains the championship and comes out fully confident. Thus, the play is also related to the Arthurian legend - Sir Gwaine and the Green Knight--based on the same myth, and rooted in the same ritual of season, mainly of winter Solstice.

Besides, Cuchulain's heroism shows Yeats's own heroism which he felt in facing the rioting, rebellious audience, just as Cuchulain attained a heroic stature after facing Red Man. The play hints at this rebellious attitude of the audience towards Yeats's plays, in the sense that the brawlers that interrupted the Abbey performance gave a model for the quarrelling pack of characters and stable boys of the play. Conall, referring to this mob, says:

There do you hear them now?
Such hatred has each for each.⁹⁷

These lines indirectly hint at Yeats's own hatred for the Irish audience and his feelings of loneliness that directly emerged from The Playboy riots. Rajan remarks that "it is distinguished by a note of political bitterness and though Romantic Ireland has still to be buried, it has already become a blind, bitter and a fool-driven land."⁹⁸

97. Ibid., p.234.

98. B. Rajan, W.B. Yeats: A Critical Introduction, p.67.

In this play everything shocks and surprises. We have violent and startling colour scheme, and rollicking poetry, etc. The stage thus seems jazzy. The play recalls the music and colour of The Shadowy Waters, which help create the sense of remoteness and the mystery. This shows the influence of Gordon Craig's new scenic concept on Yeats which Yeats explains as "a means of staging everything, that is not naturalistic, and even speculating that a completely new method even for naturalistic plays might grow from it."⁹⁹ This spectacular and jazzy type of stage further shows his pre-occupation with the model stage throughout the summer of 1918, in regard to which Yeats himself wrote "that all summer I have been playing with a little model, where there is a scene capable of endless transformations, of the expression of every mood that does not require a photographic reality...."¹⁰⁰ It suits the non-naturalistic sets and its colour scheme in the Abbey. The verse of the play is in a ballad metre. Here it employs regular rhymed couplets, corresponding with Wilfred Scawen Blunt's influence on him. Wilfred in his play entitled Fand used Alexandrine. About its ballad metre Yeats write:

99. W.B. Yeats, Letters, p.546.

100. Russell K Alspach, ed., The Variorum Edition of the Plays of W.B. Yeats, p.1310.

When I wrote in blank verse I was dissatisfied, my vaguely Medieval Countess Cathleen fitted the measure, but our Heroic age went better, or so I fancied, in the balled metre of The Green Helmet.¹⁰¹

Here Yeats's experimental dramaturgy is aimed to capture the peculiar model and tone of Irish Sagas.

The play shows a further advance of Yeats's dramatic art and craft, and his interest in trying different forms. This time Yeats has presented the story in the form of heroic farce. To quote Katharine Worth, "here there are no dark spots; but instead the wholesale correction of farce, which allows us to enjoy, as Yeats so clearly does himself, the exuberant rush of all that heroic energy. The Green Helmet was his first full-scale venture in the modern looking form that he called heroic farce"¹⁰² Unlike the plays we have analysed just before it The Green Helmet is more abstract and based on idea, philosophy and such other factors. However, in form it has precision, clarity and simplicity which Yeats desired then. The play is deficient in characterization. Human elements have only been touched here and there such as in Emer's intermittent amorous pleading with Cuchulain. However, this should not

101. W.B. Yeats, 'A General Introduction for my Work,' in Essays and Introductions, pp. 523-4.

102. Katharine Worth, The Irish Drama of Europe, p.154.

be considered as a dramaturgical flaw because Yeats here was not interested in characters of flesh and blood but in characters symbolising concepts and ideologies.

V

The Unicorn From the Stars

The Unicorn from the Stars, written in (1908) with Lady Gregory's help, is the reworking of Yeats's earlier play Where There is Nothing (1904). The present play, like The Hour Glass, seems to be a call to religion. About its genesis Yeats once wrote: "Though The Unicorn is almost altogether Lady Gregory's writing, it has far more of my spirit than Where There is Nothing. I planned out The Unicorn to carry, to a more complete realisation the central idea of the stories of The Secret Rose and I believe it has more natural affinities with these stories than with Where There is Nothing."¹⁰³ The play as Yeats's above lines imply dramatizes his knowledge and thoughts. This is again clear from Yeats's following statement: "I feel indeed that my best share in it is the idea of bringing together the rough life of the road and frenzy that the poets have found in their ancient cellar, - a prophecy, as it were, of the time when it will once again be possible for a Dickens and a

103. W.B. Yeats, Letters, p.503. For further details about its genesis see W.B. Yeats's Plays in Prose and Verse (London: Macmillan, 1922).

Shelley to be born in the one body."¹⁰⁴ The play has mystical overtones. Yeats himself has explained the Unicorn as "a private symbol belonging to my mystical order, and that it was the soul."¹⁰⁵ The play's story deals with the visionary experiences of Martin Herne, who is its main protagonist. He is presented as a visionary always lost in dreams. His uncle, Thomas Herne, who is a coach builder, thinks Martin to be sick. Martin, in fact, feels dissatisfied with this day-to-day materialistic life and wants to escape it with the help of visions and dreams. The play's story narrates how in one of his visions he hears some divine command which he fails to recall clearly. Thus, he assumes that the heavenly command was to plunder the material world. Soon, Martin takes this destructive task in his hands and gets hurt. While he is lying unconscious he sees another vision which completes his earlier incomplete vision. Now he realises that the divine command required the destruction of one's own inner self and not of the outside world. The moral conveyed through the play is that to reach God one must suppress one's own ego and desires.

The theme of the play, like Yeats's earlier play The Hour Glass, consists of a clash between the real world and the dream world. Both the worlds have been fused together

104. See A.N. Jafferres and R.S. Knowland, eds., A Comentary on the Collected Plays of W.B. Yeats, p.326.

105. W.B. Yeats, Letters, p.62.

though they run parallel to each other. This clash is to be seen between Martin Herne and Thomas Herne (Martin's uncle). The former belongs to the world of dream and the latter to the real world. The play opens in the coach builders workshop with a conversation between Thomas Herne and father John. Both are talking about Martin's habit of dreaming, which for Thomas Herne is a sickness, but Father John warns him of speaking against such vision. The latter also tells Thomas that Martin is in quest of some supreme truth and can be saved with the help of prayers. But for Thomas, a staunch believer in reality, dream is a mere illusion and coach-building is the ultimate reality for Martin. After this we are taken to Martin's world of dreams and vision which he is narrating to Father John. However, he fails to recall the whole of it, mainly the divine command. While Martin is trying to remember it, an unconscious command of a vagabound makes him feel as if the command was to plunder all earthly things. Here the situation takes a dramatic turn with Martin's involvement in destructive task. Here again we come into the world of reality. In this process Martin gets wounded and falls down in a swoon and again goes into trance. This vision makes him hear the divine command clearly, with his realisation that what he must destroy is his own self, his own desires and not the external things. Then only he can reach God and attain the supreme reality.

We see how the two worlds of reality and dream have been beautifully fused together conforming to Yeats's theory of drama according to which a play was to be both remote as well as real. What Yeats meant was that a play should maintain some distance from the common earthly life but it should also mention it in between to prevent it from becoming abstract. This fusion has made the play dramatically more effective. Here Yeats has also used symbolism for example the unicorn itself, which, as stated above, is his private symbol of his mystical order. In fact, unicorn here seems to symbolise the divine-forces of destruction and in Irish mythology unicorn stands for the preternatural.

The play seems to conform to the Samkara philosophy of Mohini Chatterji which deeply influenced Yeats. According to this philosophy the visible world is a mere illusion (maya) and man must get rid of it to reach the real world of God. Its followers thus eschew all human actions and retire from the society. Here, Martin is like these followers. He is also tired of life and is a dreamer, always lost in visions. Yeats wrote: "The chief character is a man so plunged in trance that he could not be other than all but silent."¹⁰⁶ Though for a time being when Martin to reach God indulges in destructive activities, this Samkara philosophy crumbles down, it rises when he goes into

106.W.B.Yeats's 'Note' to Plays in Prose and Verse , N.P.

trance and comes to know that:

"... now I have the whole vision plain.... The battle we have to fight is fought out in our own mind."¹⁰⁷

Like the Samkara followers Martin says: "What have I to do with the foreign army? What I have to pierce is the wild heart of time. My business is not reformation but revelation."¹⁰⁸ This relates the Unicorn with the symbol of divine forces working within the soul and manifested in the moments of inspiration; of the vision that will bring renewal from the destruction. The play is stagnant with not much action in it. It is so because of its theme of mystical visionary experiences which are difficult to admit of dramatic movement. As the play is mainly concerned with the exploration of mystical truth in an individual's journey towards the perception of the visions of higher reality, stirrings of human emotions have no place here. Again characterization in a dramatic sense has no scope. Even at the mystical level the dialectic contained in the dialogue is incapable of creating any dramatic tension to yield a satisfactory dramatic structure.

VI

The Player Queen

The Player Queen (1914) the last play of this group, belongs

107. W.B. Yeats, Collected Plays, p. 377.

108. Ibid., p. 378.

like The Green Helmet and The Herne's Egg to the tradition of farce, though first it was conceived to be a tragedy. The play, according to Yeats's own confession, is the mockery of his own theory of mask according to which every one has one's antiself that is different from what one appears to be, and that "all happiness depends on the energy to assume the mask of some other life, on a re-birth as something not oneself."¹⁰⁹ But when Yeats saw his friend George Russell's failure to assume a mask he felt discouraged. Now, it dawned upon him that his theory of mask though plausible in precepts, was impractical. So he wrote:

Then after some years came the thought that a man always tried to become his opposite, to become what he could abhor if he did not desire it, and I wasted some years and part of it each winter before I had banished this ghost and turned what I had meant a tragedy into farce; The Player Queen.¹¹⁰

This realisation of Yeats can be seen in one of its character's (Decima) refusal to assume the mask which she abhors.

In this play, Yeats to convey this fact, has fused together two different stories. One deals with the

109. See Dennis Donogue, ed., W.B. Yeats's Memoirs, p.333-4.

110. W.B. Yeats, Wheel and Butterflies (London: Macmillan, 1934), p.103.

Prime Minister, the Queen and the impending revolutions and the other one deals with Septimus, Nona and Decima, the play's important protagonists. Here Septimus seems to be a comic travesty of the poets, Seanchan and Aleel. He is going to stage a play called 'The tragical history of Noah's Deluge' in which his wife, Decima, has to play the role of Noah's wife. Decima does not want to play the role of a woman of thirty years and runs away. So Septimus is looking for her. But his beloved Nona is crazy to play this role. On the other hand, Decima feeling betrayed by her husband, Septimus, who is in love with Nona, decides to kill herself.

But just as she is about to do so the Queen, who as mentioned above is disliked by her countrymen, enters the room in order to hide herself from the rebellious mob. Thus the Queen stops Decima from committing suicide and narrates her how the mob is revolting against her. Decima in order to save the Queen from the rebellious crowd offers to wear the Queen's mask and thus became a counter-feit Queen. The latter too agrees to this proposal. In the meantime the Prime Minister announces his marriage with the Queen. As he returns he finds a counter-feit Queen. Still he marries this counter-feit Queen. The story thus ends here and Decima assumes the mask of the Queen.

The dramatist has skilfully blended the two stories; one related to Decima and the other to the Queen. Both run

parallel to each other. The play opens in an open space. First to appear on the stage is Septimus who introduces himself as: "a player, a playwright and the most famous poet in the world."¹¹¹ He says that he has a bad wife who has perhaps run-away or drowned herself, So Septimus is looking for her because she has to play important role at the Prime-Minister's command. The next to come is a crowd of citizens and countrymen who talk about the Queen. They call her a witch. They are not ready to tolerate her any longer as their Queen. They thus plan to kill her and then crown the King. One of these citizens tells us that he once saw the Queen coupling with a great white unicorn. After this we see a throne, a room with a castle where a Prime Minister, an elderly man, is talking to a group of players, one of whom is Nona, a young lady of thirty five. The Prime Minister is talking about the performance of his play entitled 'The Tragical history of Noah's Deluge.' But the heroine of the play has run away because she did not want to play the role of a woman of thirty assigned to her. Nona thus explains:

Seeing that Noah's wife is a very old woman, we are afraid that she has drowned herself indeed.¹¹²

However, the Prime Minister is determined to perform the play without delay and to put the stage manager in the

111. Ibid., p.391.

112. Ibid., p.404.

prison if the play is not staged. The Prime Minister asks the other players to search her out. They go out to find out Decima. After this the Queen comes on the stage for the first time. She is a young lady with a timid ascetic face ready to appear before the rebellious crowd and ready for martyrdom. But the Prime Minister, her would be husband, does not want all this and tells her of his plans to reconcile her to the people. But the Queen thinking herself sinful wants to undergo a penance. On the other hand we have a conversation between Decima and Nona, the latter pleading to the former to wear the mask of the Noah's wife. But Decima refuses it and says: "The only part in the world I can play is a great Queen's part."¹¹³ In the meantime, the stage Manager comes and asks Nona to play the role of Noah's wife because he wants the play to be staged very soon. In the meanwhile Septimus also comes announcing the death of the Christian era. Septimus and Nona decide to run away. Decima tries to stop them but in vain. Decima, now left alone, picks up scissors in order to put an end to her life because her husband has betrayed her. But just as she is about to do so, the Queen afraid of the crowd, enters the room and stops Decima from the suicidal attempt. She tells Decima that the crowd is running after her to kill her, so she is hiding herself. Decima suggests a device of

113. Ibid., p. 408.

escaping: "If they could mistake me for you, you would escape."¹¹⁴ She also tells the Queen that she is ready to die for the sake of Gold brocades and gold slippers of the Queen. The Queen happily accepts the proposal. Now Decima immediately puts on the Queen's mask and sits on the throne. After this, the crowd and a Bishop gather outside the gates. The latter has been summoned by the Prime Minister to reconcile the Queen with the rebellious crowd. The Prime Minister, having brought about this reconciliation between the two parties, announces his marriage with the Queen. But Septimus tells him that the present Queen is his wife Decima, a counter-feit Queen. At this the Prime Minister replies: "The crown has changed and there is no help for it. I must have that woman for wife,"¹¹⁵ and when Septimus calls the Queen a bad, flighty wife, the Prime Minister orders to cast him beyond the borders of the kingdom. Decima also agrees to this, saying "He has wronged me and I will never look upon his face again."¹¹⁶ Decima is very happy with her new mask and allows other players to dance and also promises to reward them richly.

Though this play is a mockery of this doctrine of mask and impersonality, it tells a lot about it. Yeats

114. Ibid., p.426.

115. Ibid., p.429.

116. Ibid.

defines mask as one's destiny. "There is deep enmity," says Yeats "between a man and his destiny."¹¹⁷ It conforms to Yeats's view that a poet or writer is usually hesitant to present his conclusions, discoveries and visions of truth, being not sure of them. But the actors, confident of the ideas of others, offer an opportunity to the poet to present them to the public. The poet presents a dream, the player an action, so player is a mask for the poet and poet the anti-self of the player, as the Queen says that "Players put the ideas of the poet on their faces like a mask" and "Let me become all your dreams. I will make them walk about the world in solid bone and flesh."¹¹⁸ Thus mask is a defence of inner-self against the social or external self, an element of the symbolic system in dramatic representation of an inner conflict. Besides, the play also refers to Yeats's concept of the cyclical movement of human life explained in A vision. According to this concept "each age unwinds the thread another age has wound, and it amuses one to remember that before Phidias, and his westward moving art, Persia fell, and that when full moon came round again, amid eastward-moving thought, and brought Bizantine Glory, Rome

117. W.B. Yeats, Essays, pp. 498-99.

118. W.B. Yeats, 'A Manuscript draft of The Player Queen, Reproduced in Ellmann Richard's W.B. Yeats : The Man and the Mask, (London: Faber and Faber, 1964), p.176.

fell; all things dying each other's life, living each other's death."¹¹⁹ The play demonstrates it in the sense that just as the Medieval Play 'The Noah' which Septimus plans to stage in this play deals farcically with a divinity, cataclysm that puts an end to one age and gives birth to another, similarly, Yeats's play reveals the reversal of the historical gyre from a wornout Christian era to a new era where God is taken as a Unicorn heralded by a prophet, celebrated by poet and followed by public. In this sense, the play conforms to the other later plays, though it is depicted in a farcical way, because here Yeats has used the double vision which he later did in the Preamble to A Vision. At one level, the prophet of the new age is a re-incarnation of an ass, on which Christ rode to Jerusalem. On the ironical level he is a filthy straw and brays like a donkey. Septimus has been presented as an inspired Dionysiac imagination of the land, as a Bard seeing the past, present and future, as a protector of Chaste Unicorn and superior to popular poets as Seanchan was to Chamberlain. He is a drunkard also, hen-pecked and an adulterer, a perveyor of the sounding rhetoric. Instead of dying for art, he is exiled by his wife. From one point of view he is a romantic poet, from another an important rhetorician, a Yeatsian Carlyle. 'Phase seven' of Yeats's system explains him best and worst.

119. W.B. Yeats, A Vision (B), pp. 270-71.

"Decima conforms to phase ten -- the personality whose will Yeats describes as 'The Image Brecker,' true mask, an improvisation. So such elements from his system have been presented in a comic way, total effect being one of 'baffling fun', an Ahernian Jest, like the poem 'The Phases of Moon' which Juggles with mystery, honour and ideas."¹²⁰

The play also conforms to his search for unity of being. In fact, for Yeats mask is a means of unifying desire and abhorrence, two directly opposing forces, into some harmony as is seen in the extreme antinomies in the Unicorn. Even the Unicorn, chastity itself, by its consummation of an act of lust attains its opposite -- its mask -- conveying the play's message, that is to achieve a full realisation of its whole being, the unity of being. Melchoire relating it to his poetic creation says that it is here that Yeats first of all lays stress on the act of generation 'as the necessary cause of decadence and renewal. He argues that the unity of idea and Swan, for example, in which Yeats envisioned a comic moment of destruction and renewal is 'but a projection into a comic plane of his intuition of what happens in the soul and mind of man' -- in essence, the process of poetic creation.¹²¹

120. Ibid., p.116.

121. Girogio Melchoire, The Whole Mystery of Art (London : Routledge and Kegan Poul, 1960), pp.56-60.

Structurally, the play, because of its double vision, employs a double structure that shows how Yeats drifted away from his traditional one-act form towards that of the two-act play. This play, to achieve simplicity, is in prose, though initially written in verse. Its stage conforms to Gordon Craig's stage setting, that Yeats had already experimented earlier. He says, "while at work at the Abbey Theatre I had made many experiments with Gordon Craig's screens, and both the tragedy, and the farce were intended to be played in front of those screens. My dramatic personae have no nationality, because Mr. Craig's screens, where every line must suggest some mathematical proportion, where all is fantastic, incredible, and luminous, have no nationality."¹²² The present play has conventions of dance-plays also, such as chorus which sets the scene and tells its time when the play begins. The play also has symbolic, supernatural songs represented by Atracta's song about mask which in the dance plays is related to erotic overtones attended by seeming revelation. This conforms to his new dream, marks the turning of his theatrical gyres, a pivotal moment in his dramatic history. To quote A. Parkin "emotionally, intellectually, and dramatically though not chronologically, The Player Queen is in its finished version the pivot

122. See A.N. Jafferes and A.S. Knowland, eds., A Commentary on the Collected Plays of W.B. Yeats, pp. 141-2.

between Yeats's public stage-plays and his private-room plays. Its development in embryo spans the barren hiatus between the theatre and its anti-self."¹²³ The play has theatricality and conscious delight in the role playing, showing Synge's influence on Yeats. Katharine Worth says, "we are given exhilarating freedom to choose our own perspective. The play has tilted in all directions, to the absurd, the heroic, the erotically violent, to leave us in this stage of precarious equilibrium, sure only of one thing... infinite potentiality for change in the elusive, histroinic human personality."¹²⁴ The characters of the play also exist at two levels -- the grand and the farcical. The intensity of personal life which is the main characteristic of his other characters is not present in these characters. Its main protagonist Septimus never seems to be lively.

123. Andrew Parkin, The Dramatic Imagination of W.B. Yeats, p.116.

124. Katharine Worth, The Irish Writers of Europe, p.156.

CHAPTER IV

FOUR PLAYS FOR DANCERS

As we have seen in our analysis of the plays in the preceding chapters Yeats has been experimenting with drama. His aim has been to achieve in drama the unity of musical composition. His intention of providing elitist intellectual entertainment made him move in the direction of abstraction, and simple stage. At this stage of his search for a dramatic technique he came in contact with the Japanese Noh-plays which appeared in Ezra Pound's translation of 1914.¹ Yeats sought fulfilment of his intention of adopting a dramatic medium in the Noh-plays. He wrote *Four Plays for Dancers* in strict adherence to the Noh-technique.

I

At the Hawk's Well

At the Hawk's Well (1917) is the first of Yeats's Four Plays for Dancers. As with all the plays in this group, the play under consideration also deals with native material. The central concern of the play is the search for immortality. The story of Cuchulain, used here, was fairly popular both in Irish folklore and literature. The play deals with the story of a miraculous well, whose water was

1. This point has been elaborated in the Introductory chapter.

believed to have the magical power of bestowing immortality on the drinker. A number of drinkers have been trying to lay their lips on a drop of this water. But they have all failed. This is because the well is guarded by another mythical figure -- Sidhe -- who could assume mysterious forms of birds, like a hawk. The duty of the guardian of the well was to entice the seeker of the magical water away from his efforts. The water of the well used to come to the brim only at certain moments. And the guardian had to ensure that the seeker must be tempted to fall asleep while the water flowed to the brim. The seeker used to wake up only to learn that the magical water had eluded him. The past seekers have been represented in the play through an Old Man who has been struggling to drink the water for several decade but has failed to attain any success. The main seeker Cuchulain arrives on the spot and is told the story of the well, narrated above. Cuchulain is not deterred by the hawk figure of Sidhe. He resolves to overcome the hurdle by defeating the design of Sidhe.

It is clear from the above summary of the story of the play that the main theme of the play is search for immortality, or, what has been Yeats's concern all his life, perfection of the self. The typical conventional pattern of such a theme would be the seeker, the hurdles and finally triumph or defeat. The conventional treatment of the

thematic concern of the play is provided by the story of the Old Man.

He seeks, faces hurdle in the form of being tempted into sleep when the water flows up, and finally seems to be exhausted and frustrated. The main cause of his defeat seems to be his selfish concern which is clear from his dissuading the young Cuchulain from his efforts and advising him to go away lest he should succeed. This is also clear from the Old Man's desire to share Cuchulain's success, without being determined like the latter to show a firm resolve and determination. The thematic patterning related to the Old Man offers an illuminating contrast with the young seeker, i.e., Cuchulain, who resolves to fight, to finish with the hawk which obstructs man's attempt at perfection and immortality. Cuchulain's resolve, contrasted with that of the Old Man's, is unselfish though personal fulfilment is there.

The above theme has been dramatized within the technical framework of a Noh-play technique, though Yeats has used certain conventional devices too, to make the thematic concern of the play clear and effective. The opening stage direction makes two things clear: one that Yeats's concern is not contemporary life, but some abstract theme. This is clear from the remoteness hinted at in the timing of the action, which is the 'Irish herioc age.' Secondly there is a deliberate use of the Noh-technique:

"The stage is any bare space before a wall against which stands a patterned screen. A drum and a Gong and Zither have been laid close to the screen before the play begins.... We have two lanterns upon post at the outer corner of the stage giving lighting we are most accustomed to in our rooms."² The masked players, who are the Musicians, appear on the stage and start unfolding the cloth. There is also on the back wall a 'black cloth' suggesting a hawk. While the Musicians spread out the cloth they sing about the details of the well, which is the setting of the dramatic action.³ The Musicians express their doubt about the success of the man going on a mission, which has not yet been explained to us. It also makes it clear that the struggle for the fulfilment of the yet unexplained mission may entail a life-long effort. Whether the effort is worthwhile and likely to be rewarded is left with a question mark. The two threads of the theme have been introduced: one, an unidentified seeker of something connected with the well, and second the possibility of frustration or reward.

"While the cloth has been spread out, the guardian of the well has entered and is now crouching upon the ground. She

2. W.B. Yeats, Collected Plays, p.207.

3. Ibid., p.208.

is entirely covered by a black cloak."⁴ So the ambivalent symbolism of the guardian of the well is hinted at in the above stage direction. She may stand for purity and perfection which are covered with the blackness of worldliness, materialism and man's inner rottenness. The guardian now crouches upon the ground to act as a curtain between the seeker and the well. That the water of the well is going to rise and that a vigilant spiritual state is needed to attain self-perfection are made clear by the Musician in the concluding lines of the song:

The boughs of the hazel shake,
The sun goes down in the west.
The heart would be always awake,
The heart would turn to its rest.⁵

These lines, offering a clue to the nature of spiritual conflict or tension with a possible pessimistic conclusion, are linked with the Old Man. But they are linked with the Young Man also because their message applies to him as well.

Then the poet subtly uses 'speaking' for 'singing' for the Musicians. This shows that here the chorus is not just a commentator but acts as an actor also. Yeats seems to unite the Noh-technique with that of the Greek drama in

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid., p.209.

extending the function of the chorus. In this speech the first Musician further explains the deserted and desolate surroundings of the well. Withered leaves of the hazel covering half of the well create an impression of frustration. The picture of sea wind "that blows out of the sea/ Turns over the heaped-up leaves at her side;⁶ again evokes a mood which fits in with failure and frustration. In this speech the guardian of the well has been described as a vigilant and alert watcher on the well. Alertness on her part is clear from her heavy eyes that know nothing but look upon the stone. She is described as something frightening. The second Musician says "I am afraid of this place."⁷ That the quest is not only fraught with difficulty requiring perseverance but also with danger is explicitly conveyed in the lines of the second Musician. Followed by this is the two Musicians's choric commentary on the cause of the failure of a quester:

'Why should I sleep?' The heart cries,
 For the wind, the salt wind, the sea wing,
 Is beating a cloud through the skies;
 I would wander always like the wind.⁸

After the theme of quest and the attendant difficulties have been established by the choric Musicians during

6 . Ibid.

7 . Ibid.

8 . Ibid.

their unrolling and rolling of the cloth we see an Old Man entering through the audience. This theatrical device of using the space for the entry of a character is Yeats's open rejection of the illusionistic, naturalistic drama. The Musician here introduces us to an Old Man described as 'climbing up,' showing his attempt to get something. The first Musician tells us that this man has been waiting for the last 'fifty years'. Fifty years not in mathematical sense, but implying a long period of life i.e., all his youth. So here one of the questers has been introduced to us. The lines are well modulated and effectively narrative. Here at the technical level we see that Yeats by giving no particular name to this man and simply calling him 'an old man' has not individualized the character.

After this we are shown the Old Man moving to and fro, to the accompaniment of the taps of the drums. This is in keeping with Yeats's desire to unite the elements of drama and music to produce a unified impression. The Old Man moves and lifts his hands, conveying through these gesture the sense of making fire. This illustrates Yeats's taste for drama that works by suggestion and not by direct statement.' This further corresponds to his belief in the simplified stage, with no such props as to present fire itself on the stage; and his belief in antinaturalistic stage. In fact Yeats realised that since his audience were

not well trianed in such a symbolic technique, a kind of explanation was necessary to make the play clearer to the Irish audience. So here we see that Yeats has not merely copied the Noh- tedchnique, but has also moulded it to suit his own advantage. At the level of technique we find here a slight deviation from the Noh- tedchnique in the simultaneous occurrence of narration, action and introduction of character. This simultaneity is an important feature of the technique here. The Old Man eventually appears on the stage and speaks "Why don't you speak to me? Why don't you say."⁹ The questions that the Old Man asks the Musicians in his long twenty-one line dialogue, only reconfirm his failure and frustration and his waiting in vain. The Sidhe who is the pervasive controlling power has been explicitly mentioned here. But the Old Man obviously has not understood the design of Sidhe. It would be relevant to pause here for a moment to explain the significance of Sidhe. According to Yeats himself Sidhe refer to "Irish Gods and Goddesses whom rich men call Tuatha-de-denan or the tribes of the Godess Danu, but the poor call them the Sidhe, Aes-Sidhe or Sluagh-Sidhe, the people of faery hills. However sidhe is also a gaelic term for wind, and surely Sidhe have much to do with the wind. They travel in whirling wind, the winds that were called the dance of the

9.. Ibid., p 210.

daughters of Herodias, in the middle ages. Herodians referred to some old Goddess."¹⁰ Yeats further explains the Sidhe symbolism in the play. She is a potent obstruction in the way of quest but she is not malignant. She is the controlling deity of the wind, sea and the hills. The Sidhe, as it were, stands for a catalytic agent to thrash out the crust on human self which stands in his way of spiritual perfection.

Next to appear on the stage is the Young Man, a second quester, who is the legendary Cuchulain. He, unlike the Old Man, directly makes his appearance before the audience. So here too we find blending of both Noh and conventional techniques regarding the art of characterization, and entry of the dramatic personae. Cuchulain stands for heroic determination and perseverance in quest. In the first four lines that the Young Man utters, he tells us that he too is in quest of something not yet found: "I cannot find what I am looking for."¹¹ The Young Man declares that he is Cuchulain, son of Sualtim, belonging to an ancient house-hold, popular among Irish-men. But the intervening comment by the Old Man that he has never heard that name, is symbolic of the justification of the Old Man's failure because he never knew firm determination and perseverance which the Young Man symbolises. The Old Man

10. See Yeats's 'The Hosting of Sidhe,' in The Collected Plays, p. 61.

11. Ibid., p. 211.

associates him with battles and women, qualities of a warrior and of chivalry. The Young Man then tells us that he has come here looking for the miraculous well and asks the Old Man to lead him to "wherein three hazels drop their nuts and withered leaves, and where a solitary girl keeps a watch among the grey boulders."¹² He has heard that whosoever drinks the miraculous water of this well, becomes immortal. So the Young Man is in search of the same well, at the edge of which the Old Man has been waiting for a long time. Though presently he is at the well, it is so dried up and filled with leaves that he can hardly see it. What he sees is "A hollow among stones half-full of leaves."¹³ The following lines of the Old Man again convey the philosophy of constant struggle, despite all obstructions, for achieving the desired goal :

And do you think so great a gift is found
By no more toil than spreading out a sail,
And climbing a steep hill.¹⁴

The Old Man here refers to his own long hopeless waiting at the well for its miraculous water. Here youthful quest is contrasted with the failed quest of the Old Man. Thus the theme of quest which began earlier in mystery, is clarified.

12. Ibid., p.212.

13. Ibid.

14. Ibid.

The theme develops further when the Young Man conjectures: "So it seems/There is some moment when water fills it."¹⁵ The Old Man confirms this, and says that the well is filled with water at some secret moment, known to none but to the divine souls. But the Young Man, sure of his good luck, claims to succeed very soon. So he is opposed to the dismal failure of the Old Man. In the following speech the Old Man narrates to the Young Man, his past bitter story of being cheated by the dancers, which prevented him from getting the miraculous water of the well, and finally led him to his failure in his quest for immortality:

I came like you
 When young in body and in mind, and blown
 By what had seemed to me a lucky sail
 The well was dry, I sat upon its edge,
 I waited the miraculous flood, I waited
 While the years passed and withered me away
 I have snared the birds for food and eaten grass
 And drunk the rain, and neither in dark nor shine
 Wandered too far away to have heard the plash
 And yet the dancers have deceived me. Thrice
 I have awakened from a sudden sleep
 To find the stones were wet.¹⁶

These lines are a fine specimen of simple dramatic narration, conforming to Eliot's ideal of a verse in poetic

15. Ibid., p.213.

16. Ibid., pp.213-14.

drama, i.e., "A verse is not to see Through but to look At."¹⁷

Opposed to the Old Man's narration of his failure is the Young Man's resolve to succeed which is interrupted by a sudden cry of the hawk. Even the Young Man feels its impact and wonders,

And though I have good hawks, the best in the world
I had fancied, I have not seen its like.¹⁸

The Old Man further informs that the hawk is shivering which is the sign of the imminent coming of water. Hence he asks the Young Man to go away and leave the place for him, so that Cuchulain does not drink its entire water. His belief that the "young men are greedy, and if you drink the first you will drink it all"¹⁹ shows his lack of trust in the Young Man's intention. These lines show that though the Old Man had waited all his youth vigilantly, he had such human weaknesses as selfishness, distrust and fear. This is why he "cannot bear her eyes, they are not of this world."²⁰ Contrasted with this is the Young Man's fearless courage to face these eyes. It implies that to succeed in quest,

17. T.S. Eliot, "Five Points on Dramatic Writing," Townsmen (July, 1938), p.10.

18. W.B. Yeats, Collected Plays, p.214.

19. Ibid., p.216.

20. Ibid.

courage and confidence are also required alongwith struggle. Here it is pertinent to remark that Yeats has subtly fused the mundane and the spiritual. The Old Man's greed, self-centredness, and selfishness are the lowly human instincts which must be overcome in order to attain to a higher stature of the self, which Cuchulain stand for.

After this the hawk woman is shown as rising. While the Old Man covers his head out of fear, the young man determines not to leave the place till he succeeds in his quest. This is followed by the guardian of the well shown as dancing and 'moving like a hawk.' Here dance is typical to the Noh pattern in forming the climax of the play. Indeed it is this dance that decides the fate of these two questers, in the sense that if they overcome it they would be victorious. This dance lulls the Old Man to sleep and produces its effect on the Young Man also:

The madness has laid upon him now,
for he grows pale and staggers to his feet.²¹

Then we see the Young Man pursuing the bird. In the meantime, the musician tells us that water splashed and went back. Now we are told that the guardian has left, and the Young Man drops his spear as if in a dream. The chorus describes this failure as follows:

21. Ibid., p.217.

He has lost what may not be found
Till men heap his burial-mound.²²

Then the Old Man is shown 'creeping up to the wall' and in his speech curses the dancers for deluding and cheating him through his life. This sense is conveyed by the Young Man also: "She has fled from me and hidden in the rocks."²³ The Musicians cry 'Aoife!' and strike a gong. The mention of 'Aoife' connecting her to Sidhe recalls the story dramatised in On Baile's Strand. Sidhe here is a kind of disturbance of conscience for Cuchulain as she neither lets him live happily in his wordly life nor does she let him gain immortality by drinking the water of this well. This subtle fusion of the story from the Red Branch Cycle and the theme of the play make the play's thematic structure more complex by bringing in the ideas of conscience, betrayal and revenge. This makes the young quester's task truly formidable. The Young Man's heroism and firm determination are to be brought into a sharp relief through this suggested complexity in the theme. But the Young Man instead of running away, as suggested by the Old Man, determines to stay, saying "I will face them."²⁴ He goes away now, no longer as if tranced, but shouldering his spear and announcing his coming:

22. Ibid.

23. Ibid., p.218.

24. Ibid.

He comes! Cuchulain, son of Sualtim, comes!²⁵

Here in facing Sidhe he is facing himself. It is self-reckoning at the sin or wrong committed by him in the past which he was ignorant of. So hurdles are in fact, internal, of conscience, of sin and guilt. Man's determination to pursue the shadow may appear foolish for few people, but for a true quester it is the right wisdom. So the dominant idea put forth is an abstract thought, i.e., soul's quest for immortality, transcendence and spirituality. The dominant mood, though it is of failure, is not of giving in, rather of pursuing. The play remains open-ended and is not concluded as a conventional play. But the concluding quest is itself rewarding and worth pursuing though it is bound to be beset with struggle and attendant frustration. The following lines from the song for the folding and unfolding of the cloth:

O Lamentable shadows,
Obscurity of strife!
I choose a pleasant life
Among indolent meadows;
Wisdom must live a bitter life.²⁶

are by way of the conclusion of the play. In fact, the very story is abstract, with no well-made plot. Here is a fusion

25. Ibid.

26. Ibid., p.219.

of music, action, dance and symbols, all giving a unified impression like a flame which Yeats desired to achieve in drama throughout his career.

II

The Only Jealousy of Emer

The Only Jealousy of Emer (1919), a sequel to On Baile's Strand, like At the Hawk's Well, deals with the Cuchulain group of Irish Saga. It is based on the Irish Saga of 'The Sickbed of Cuchulain'.²⁷ Yeats has omitted the first half of the Saga, since he conceived of its action as succeeding the story of the death of its main protagonist, Cuchulain in On Baile's Strand. In the present play Emer and Eithne Inguba, Cuchulain's wife and mistress respectively, are attending upon his dead body lying on the sea shore. Both are trying to bring his soul back from the clutches of Sidhe who is an evil spirit with supernatural power. In this attempt to get Cuchulain's soul freed, Emer asks Eithne Inguba to cry out his name, believing that he might respond to it. She appeals to her to "call out dear secrets till you have touched his heart."²⁸ Further she asks Eithne

27. For a detailed account of the source of the play see Brigit Bjersby, An Interpretation of Cuchulain Legend in the Works of W.B. Yeats (Upasala, 1950), pp.45-6.

28. W.B. Yeats, Collected Plays, p.286.

Inguba to kiss his lips so that the pressure and warmth of her mouth could reach him. After this, Bricrui, the 'maker of discords' among Gods and men comes in the figure of Cuchulain and puts the condition that if Emer gives up and renounces the hope of possessing her husband, he may be revived. Emer first refuses to do so:

I have but two joyous thoughts, two things I prize,
A hope, a memory, and now you claim that hope.²⁹

Soon Fand, the representative of the Women of Sidhe, comes, who, as Cuchulain's figure tells us, stands for those who "are dexterous fishers and they fish for men."³⁰ Hearing this, and seeing Fand (Bricrui's enemy) drawing the Ghost of Cuchulain away into the life of immortal and inhuman love, Emer cries out, as the Ghost is about to yield: "I renounce Cuchulain's love for ever."³¹ Immediately, Emer tells that the Ghost of Cuchulain has woken up calling Eithne Inguba, not Emer. Thus here we see that the story of sacrifice on the part of a wife for her husband has been dramatized.

The brief narration of the story shows the basic conventional technique of presenting a plot. But as in the preceding play, here too, the Noh elements have been deliberately used to present the above story in a way that

29. Ibid., p.239.

30. Ibid., p.290.

31. Ibid., p.294.

it is satisfying both intellectually as well as emotionally. The play opens with the folding and unfolding of cloth alongwith the Musician's song, which is typical of the Noh plays. Like the preceding play here also the Musicians act both as chorus as well as the participants in the action. The initial choric commentary by the Musicians points to the tragic element which the play unfolds during the course of its development. The first Musician narrates the opening situation of the action:

A man lies dead or swooning,
That amorous man... renowned Cuchulain,
Queen Emer at his side.³²

The locale of the action -- a fisherman's house on a sea-shore, where Cuchulain is lying dead, is also given. The introductory anonymity of the characters is in keeping with the Noh device of abstraction. In a characteristically Noh manner, the characters are introduced not directly but through a chorus. After these introductory details, Emer appears on the stage in person and in her first speech invites Eithne Inguba to sit beside the bed, without any fear. Then we have a conversation between these two attendants, from which we come to know that Emer does not believe Cuchulain to be dead, for "the very heavens when that day's

32. Ibid., pp.282-83.

at hand, so that his death may not lack ceremony, / will throw out
fires, and the earth grow red with blood."³³ Emer then
narrates to Eithne Inguba how Cuchulain has come to this
condition:

Towards noon in the assembly of the Kings
He met with one who seemed a while most dear.
The Kings stood round; some quarrel was blown up;
He drove him out and killed him on the shore
At Baile' tree, and he who was so killed
Was his own son begot on some wild woman
When he was young, or so I have heard it said;
And being mad with sorrow, he ran out;
And after, to his middle in the foam,
With shield before him and with sword in hand,
He fought the deathless sea...
Until the water had swept over him;
But the waves washed his senseless image up
And laid it at this door.³⁴

The above lines in a dramatically effective narrative give the
details of the antecedent event. Emer believes that her
husband is not dead and suspects that some supernatural
conspiracy has been employed:

An image has been put into his place,
A sea-borne log bewitched into his likeness.³⁵

33. *Ibid.*, pp.283-84.

34. *Ibid.*, p.284.

35. *Ibid.*, pp.284-85.

Eithne Inguba, now suggests a device to bring back Cuchulain's soul. She asks Emer to cry out his name in the belief that:

All that are taken from our sight, they say,
 Loiter amid the scenery of their lives
 For certain hours or days, and should he hear
 He might, being angry, drive the changeling out.³⁶

Emer on the other hand asks Eithne Inguba to cry out Cuchulain's name, because her voice has been so sweet and enticing to him that he cannot help but listen. Now Emer first plans to throw new logs upon the hearth and stir these half-burnt logs till they produce fire as a device of frightening away old Manannan's unbridled horses with their horsemen. She believes that: "all the enchantments of the dreaming foam/ Dread the hearth-fire."³⁷ The making of fire is suggested through the movements of Emer's hands in the air and not through any illusion-creating device. When her exorcising trick does not seem to work, Emer requests Eithne Inguba to utter secrets that might touch the heart of Cuchulain. Eithne Inguba obeys her. But, seeing no progress in this either, Emer asks her to kiss the image of Cuchulain and says:

The pressure of your mouth upon his mouth
 May reach him where he is.³⁸

36. Ibid., p.285.

37. Ibid., p.286.

38. Ibid., p.287.

After this, a slight development in the story is noticeable when Eithne Inguba, having kissed the image, reveals that Cuchulain is in the possession of some evil spirit that dried her heart as she touched his lips. Here we are being prepared for the entry of one more character identified as some evil spirit. Immediately, Emer tells us that by the pressure of Eithne Inguba's lips Cuchulain has thrown this changeling away. Now, when Emer asks about his whereabouts, this figure of Cuchulain comes on the stage and directly tells us that he is Bricrui "Maker of discords among Gods and men, called Bricrui of the Sidhe."³⁹ In the conversation that follows between him and Emer, we come to know that he has got supernatural powers. Then we are told that he has come to enter into a treaty with Emer. According to this treaty Emer has to pay a price to get the release of Cuchulain from him. The price demanded by him is that Emer must give up the hope that "some day she will be the apple of his eye again."⁴⁰ Emer blames him for exploiting her. Bricrui warns Emer that if she does not agree to his proposal Cuchulain would die of wounds and toils in the company of some strange women. After this Bricrui makes Emer see Cuchulain by dissolving the dark that

39. Ibid. Bricrui refers to the Bricrui of the bitter tongue, a Red Branch Warrior who was capable of setting people against each other, and of intriguing.

40. Ibid., p.288.

had hidden Cuchulain from her, but he retains the darkness that hides Emer from Cuchulain. Seeing Cuchulain crouching, Emer cries out, 'My husband.' Bricrui tells her that Cuchulain is a mere phantom, unable to hear any cries; he can only dream. Further, Bricrui says that in his dream though he assumed his familiar shape, yet he crouches, knowing nothing of his existence. Then the Woman of Sidhe is shown entering and standing a little inside the door. The strange woman mentioned earlier is now identified as Woman of Sidhe, the one we saw in the preceding play.

As in the preceding play, here also Woman of Sidhe has been associated with evil as an enchanteress of men and as being possessed, and "No knife can wound that body of air."⁴¹ After this, we see Woman of Sidhe dancing round the crouching Cuchulain. In order to make her look more like an idol than a human being, her mask and clothes are so made that they suggest gold, bronze, silver or brass. Then we see Cuchulain inquiring about this Woman of Sidhe. He reminisces:

I know you now, for long ago
 I met you on a cloudy hill
 Beside old thorn-trees and a well.
 A woman danced and a hawk flew,
 I held out arms and hands; but you,

41. Ibid., p.261.

That now seem friendly, fled away,
Half woman and half bird of prey.⁴²

Though Woman of Sidhe variously lures him to kiss her, yet, as soon as he is about to kiss her, he overcomes this temptation and turns away crying: 'O'Emer, Emer.' But again she tries to lure him away from Emer. Cuchulain asks for the mouth of Woman of Sidhe to kiss her and gets ready to follow her. At this very moment, when Cuchulain seems to yield to Woman of Sidhe, Bricrui asks Emer to make haste in crying out that she renounces Cuchulain's love forever. Bricrui even tempts her saying that he is Fand's enemy (Fand is the name of Woman of Sidhe here) and has come to thwart her will, and says: "Renounce him, and her power is at an end."⁴³ Seeing Cuchulain ready to go with Fand, Emer eventually announces, "I renounce Cuchulain's love for ever."⁴⁴

As soon as Emer announces this, we see Bricrui sinking back upon the bed. And Emer tells us that Cuchulain has awakened. As Cuchulain awakens he calls Eithne Inguba, not Emer, who has brought him back to life. Then the first Musician is seen on the stage, and unfolds the cloth. The Musicians again sing a song while doing so, wherein they

42. Ibid., p. 292.

43. Ibid., p.294.

44. Ibid.

make general comments on the bitter rewards of love:

O bitter reward...
 He that has loved the best
 May turn from a statue
 His too human breast.⁴⁵

This last song has been variously interpreted. Nathan interprets it as "anti-strophe, so to speak, to the play's opening song, which was devoted to introduce the beautiful Eithne Inguba -- as Inguba, at one extreme form of woman, receives the musicians' first tribute, so Fand, at the other extreme, receives their last."⁴⁶ According to Herald Bloom "this song expresses Fand's bitter grief and Yeats's acute sense of his vision's limitations."⁴⁷

We see that the theme of the play is an act of sacrifice on the part of a woman to save her husband from evil spirits. She herself chooses this, and thus rises above petty jealousy. So, like Countess Cathleen, Emer makes self-sacrifice in the sense that she has to give up love for the sake of love. This is undoubtedly an ironic situation. Peter Ure interprets this act of self-sacrifice differently, calling her deed 'self-delighting' and 'self-affrighting.'

45. Ibid., p.295.

46. Leonard E. Nathan, The Tragic Drama of W.B. Yeats (New York: Columbia Press, 1965), p.238.

47. Herald Bloom, Yeats (London : University Press, 1970), pp.298-306.

He holds that "Emer's heroic deed, like Cuchulain's in At the Hawk's Well, is an assertion of her identity, of her name as loving wife, and her only reward, like Deirdre's, is that the long-remembering harpers shall have matter for their song."⁴⁸ Ashley Myles interprets the play in terms of Yeats's philosophy of self and anti-self. According to this everyone has two selves: what we really are and what we pretend to be. The reality lies in the interaction between the two: "We use our real selves by certain screens which we wish to put up before others. The 'show-off' screens are the masks.... To show this clash of the self and anti-self, Yeats has summoned up the help of dramatic irony. It is in accordance with his doctrine of the ironical clash within one-self that we are shown Cuchulain's faithless self existing alongside his own anti-self of fidelity."⁴⁹ Professor Misra, interprets the play in terms of Yeats's philosophy in A Vision and says that "Woman of Sidhe belongs to the fifteenth phase- of perfection - a symbol of eternity. Cuchulain to the twelveth phase - the heroes crescent, and can't reach her:

Old memories

A woman in her happy youth...

Memories have pulled my head upon my knees.

48. Peter Ure, Yeats the Playwright, p.74.

49. Ashley Myles, Theatre of Aristocracy: A Study of Yeats as a Dramatist (Gwalior: Gwalior University Press, 1981), pp. 82-3.

So the loyal wife who releases him binds his soul again to the wheel of time. Swinging of human life between time and eternity is its real core."⁵⁰ Rajan opines that "once again we see the pattern of failure. But here the protagonist knows the pattern. Man cannot choose his particular happiness but he can choose his particular unhappiness."⁵¹ As regards its technique, the play seems to be an advance over At the Hawk's Well, because here we have a well-made story which develops gradually through suspense and curiosity. Here the play has a typical tragic pattern: The Protagonist, Emer, is faced with a dilemma. But the dilemma is not presented in the classical structural form at the beginning of the play. It is on the contrary developed in the tradition of a well-made play which Yeats disparaged so vehemently. The dilemma is Emer's choice between two solutions to her predicament. Her choice and decision are her own. Besides, here all the characters have been given particular names and identity. Even Woman of Sidhe has been identified by the name of Fand, while in the earlier play no such name was given to her. Technically the play is considered "to be most intricately plotted of the Yeatsian Noh plays."⁵²

50. K.S. Misra, Twentieth Century English Poetic Drama: A Revaluation (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1981), p.37.

51. B. Rajan, W.B.Yeats : A Critical Introduction, pp.98-101.

52. Peter Ure, Yeats the Playwright, p.72.

III

The Dreaming of the Bones

The Dreaming of the Bones (1919) differs from the earlier two dance-plays in the sense that while the latter are based on Cuchulain myth, the former uses a different myth, which has a wider application. The play has affinity with The Words Upon the Window Pane and Purgatory in respect of the use of this myth. The Dreaming of the Bones was ostensibly written in keeping with the manifesto of the Irish Dramatic Movement. The story, derived from Irish legendary history, has been brought to bear upon the contemporary political activities of Ireland. Yeats himself says:

The conception of the play is derived from the world-wide belief that the dead dream back, for a certain time through the more personal thought and deeds of life. The wicked, according to Cornelius Agrippa, dream themselves to be consumed by flames and persecuted by demons.⁵³

The myth is associated with the Indian philosophic thought of rebirth, and wanderings of the soul before its redemption. These Indian and Cristian thoughts constitute the central thematic concern of the play which is nationalistic in its spirit of the reawakening of the Irish consciousness during Ireland's struggle for freedom. It also has a close

53. W.B. Yeats, Four Plays for Dancers, p.129.

affinity with the Japanese Noh play called Nishikigi, which has been described by Yeats in his Visions and Beliefs.⁵⁴

The play has a thick-textured background source-material based on Irish legend and contemporary history of Ireland, i.e., 1916 Easter-Rising and it is warfed with the Indian philosophical thought. The two characters of the play are identified with the historical Dervorgilla and Diarmuid.⁵⁵

The play deals with the story of the dreaming-back of the two dead lovers, called Dervorgilla and Diarmuid. They had been overthrown by the husband of the girl Dervorgilla. Consequently they, because of their mild fury of taking revenge, brought the Normans in. Now for this national betrayal they suffer the pangs of separation in union. Their predicament is ironic and pathetic in the sense that, though they walk together, they cannot be united. When they are about to meet and embrace each-other, the memory of their crime intervenes and separates them. To purify themselves of this sin they undergo a penance and thus are seen wandering on the borders of Galway. Here, they meet a Young Man identified as a revolutionary soldier to whom they narrate the story of their sin and tell him that they can be relieved of their remorse: "If somebody of their own race at

54. W.B. Yeats, Essays, pp.67-8.

55. For details see Norman Jafferes and A.S. Knowland, eds., A Commentary on the Collected Plays of W.B. Yeats, pp.157-8.

last would say, 'I have forgiven them.'⁵⁶ But the Young Man refuses to forgive them and they continue suffering their purgatorial expiation, through separation in union.

This story has been presented in the Noh-technique. The characters of the play are a Young Man, a Young Girl, a Stranger and three musicians. These Musicians correspond to the Noh-chorus. All are masked. The action takes place in 1916 (the year of Easter-Rising). The stage like that of the preceding two plays is a bare place, highly suggestive and symbolic. The play begins with the characteristic folding and unfolding of the cloth by the three Musicians. The opening song of the Musicians, in the characteristic manner of the Noh play, functions as a choric commentary. It introduces the locale of the action and one of the main characters of the play. The anonymity of the characters, in the manner of a conventional play, arouses suspense. The next characters to appear on the stage are a Stranger and a Young Girl "in the costume of a past time.... They wear heroic masks."⁵⁷ In the conversation between the Young Man introduced earlier and the Stranger, we are told about the Young Man in some detail. Here, in a conventional manner, Yeats is revealing a character through dialogue which makes the play dramatically effective. Here the characteristic

56. W.B. Yeats, Collected Plays, p.442.

57. Ibid., p.434.

Noh reliance on gestures is done away with and, instead, dialogue becomes the dramatic medium. We here come to know that the Young Man is a soldier who fought in Dublin and had worked in the Post-Office. The police are following him, so he wants to escape to the mountain and "keep watch until an Aran Coracle puts in a rocky shore under Finvara."⁵⁸ Now the Young Man no longer remains anonymous, but he has not been adequately individualized. He represents any patriotic Irish man fighting for a national cause.

The stranger suggests to the Young Man some hiding places. Here the theme further develops. The Stranger and the Young Man talk about 'dreaming back' and national betrayal.⁵⁹ The Young Man says that the dead by dreaming back undergo penance, as his grandmother had told him.

After this, we see them proceeding towards the Abbey of Corcomroe. Here, the first Musician gives a commentary on their journey through the paths they have to cross. Technically, this commentary is a dramatic device to cope with the bare stage that merely provides an image of a thing and not the thing itself. They, as the stage direction indicates "go round the stage once,"⁶⁰ suggesting their

58. Ibid., p.435.

59. Ibid., p.436.

60. Ibid., p.437.

journey through various paths. But here Yeats in order to make it easy for us to grasp this sense, provides this type of commentary. This also lends economy and precision to the play's structure.

After this the Musicians sing a song describing the locale of the action where these people have arrived. Here, the song, conforming to the songs of the Noh plays, performs the task of evoking the feelings of awe, fear, mystery, loneliness and remoteness through its reference to the 'dreaming bones that cry out,' etc. After this the Stranger informs us of their arrival at the Abbey of Corcomroe. In the discussion that follows between them regarding this place, the theme of national betrayal is discussed again; they also refer to the tomb of Donoghue O'Brien who is said to have rebelled against the King of Thomond. Donoghue O'Brien here is identified with the historical figure of Donoghue O'Brien "who was one of the groups of the nobles who invited the scots to invade Thomond and acquire it from its King. After their defeat Donoghue escaped from the battlefield and fell in 1317, near the Abbey of Corcomroe."⁶¹ He was thus a traitor. The Young Man too comments that: "It was men like Donoghue who made Ireland weak."⁶² He even curses him, and feels that he must undergo

61. A Norman Jafferes and A.S. Knowland, eds., A Commentary on the Collected Plays of W.B. Yeats, p.162.

62. W.B. Yeats, Collected Plays, p.439.

penance for this crime. Here, there is a fusion of both the philosophical and the political concepts in the Young Man's assertion.

The Young Man suggests that to free himself of this crime, he must undergo penance by reliving his earthly life.

After this the Young Girl, who was earlier described as accompanying the Stranger, comes on the stage. She has a long conversation with the Young Man in which she gives us details about herself. Her speech narrates the story of these rebels, telling us in the first five or six lines that they were common sinners. They turned into rebels either by some momentary impulse or the commandment of some petty king who hated Thomond. The next lines of her speech tell us of the bitter consequences of this rebellion. The Young Girl gives us more details about these rebels and their pathetic condition while they were undergoing penance. But the exact nature of their sin is not yet disclosed. It is intentionally withheld to produce curiosity. However, the Young Girl's next speech explains this sin:

Her King and lover
Was overthrown in battle by her husband
Being blind, and bitter and bitterly in love he brought
A foreign army from across the sea.⁶³

Here, it is revealed that this was in fact the story of Diarmuid

63. Ibid., p. 442.

and Dervorgilla. This fact is clarified when the Young Man says, so "you speak of Diarmuid and Dervorgilla."⁶⁴ The Young Girl admitting this, says, "Yes, yes, I spoke of that most miserable, most accursed pair."⁶⁵ In this speech she also tells us of the remedy of their sin. They, she tells us, can be freed of this sin only "if somebody of their race at last would say, 'I have forgiven them'"⁶⁶ At this the Young Man's immediate reaction is not to forgive them.

Then, following the Noh technique, Yeats presents a dance by this Young Girl which shows her being possessed. The Young Man says: "who are you? What are you? You are not natural."⁶⁷ These lines show that they are not what they have posed to be before us till now. And here when the Young Girl says "Seven hundred years our lips have never met,"⁶⁸ their identity is revealed, and we immediately recognize them as Diarmuid and Dervorgilla -- two national betrayers. The dance presents the climax of the play. The Young Man overcomes this enticing dance at the moment when he is about to yield:

I had almost yielded and forgiven it all
Terrible the temptation and the place.⁶⁹

64. Ibid.

65. Ibid.

66. Ibid.

67. Ibid., p. 443.

68. Ibid.

69. Ibid., p. 444.

The couple is thus condemned to continue the sufferings of their past unforgivable sin of national betrayal. Peter Ure says, "This moment of 'almost yielding' in some ways intensifies the theme by offering and then withdrawing a hope of relief."⁷⁰ Here again we find the conventional pattern of reversing the state of affairs and thus heightening the tension. This also seems to correspond to Aristotle's reversal of situation, which he regarded as one of the two ingredients of a complex plot. The play ends with the folding and unfolding of the cloth. It is accompanied by the song of the three Musicians referring to the belief of 'dreaming-back' of the dead.

Thus we see that in this play Yeats has blended the Noh technique with the conventional technique. Here, opposed to the abstraction of the Noh plays Yeats has achieved in At the Hawk's Well, we see that the story element is fairly dominant. Like the conventional plays the story here unfolds itself with interrupted regularity arousing both the feelings of curiosity and suspense. Even the characters are from contemporary life as in the usual conventional play and not exclusively from mythology. Characters are also representatives, not particular men and women, conforming to the Noh play technique. According to

70. Peter Ure, Yeats the Playwright, p.95.

Peter Ure the play "is nearest of the three to that pure presentation of the Image in theatre, which Frank Kermode sees as rationale of all Yeats's adoption of Noh."⁷¹ Yeats himself has called it "the best play he had written,"⁷² in matters of technique.

Peter Ure further says that the concentration and the unity that are the hallmarks of the beauty and power of the Noh, in which all the elements are united to produce a single clarified impression, are more noticeable here than in his other plays. It is achieved by its imagery, by the description of its setting and locale and by concentration.⁷³ According to him the play like the other Noh-plays, is divided into two portions, separated by an interlude. B. Rajan calls the play "the most successful of The Four Plays for Dancers, in assimilating the atmosphere of the Noh. Here the image clusters in the song embody Yeats's understanding of the language of Noh 'as playing upon a single metaphor,' as deliberate as the echoing rhythm of the Chinese or Japanese painting."⁷⁴ Anniah Gowda says: "Yeats gives the play written for a 'theatre's antiself' a local habitation by placing the scene in the ruined Abbey of

71. Ibid., p.97.

72. W.B. Yeats, Essays, p.227.

73. Peter Ure, Yeats the Playwright, p.91.

74. B. Rajan, W.B. Yeats: A Critical Introduction, pp.101-3.

Corcomroe."⁷⁵ About its language he comments that "the conversation, couched in tough and matter-of-fact lines, characteristic of Yeats's later poetry, reveals to us the story of civil war and their flight."⁷⁶ In the final estimation of the play we can assert that Yeats here, for the first time, is involved in human feelings and passions. The feelings of regret, hopelessness and irretrievable alienation characterizing the predicament of the dead pair are shorn of all the abstractions and mysteriousness so that their human appeal reaches the audience in an unimpeded manner. The varied modulations of the verse given in keeping with the demands of the narrative as well as that of lyrical nostalgia and feelings of hopelessness is Yeats's unique achievement in this play. By lending philosophical validity to the idea of the dreaming of the dead Yeats has also taken care of the intellectual satisfaction of the audience besides their emotional response. In fact, it has been Yeats's continuing concern to have this type of unified response in a poetic play which he, unfortunately, fails to achieve else where except in this play.

IV

Calvary

Calvary (1921) is the last of Yeats's Four Plays For Dancers. The play alongwith The Ressurrection dramatizes

75. Anniah Gowda, A Revival of the English Poetic Drama, p.231.

76. Ibid.

the myth of Christ. Like The Dreaming of the Bones, which dramatizes the degeneration of the feelings of nationality, this play dramatizes the degeneration of religious feelings. The play gives us a glimpse of Yeats's philosophy of history and Christianity. As regards Christianity, he saw the pagan world, chiefly that of Greece and Rome, as primary civilization; which at the time of Christ's coming was drawing to its foreordained end in the cyclical movement of history and was becoming subject to the loss of control, which heralded the birth of the next age. This next age, i.e., the Christian age, was antithetical to its predecessor. It begins with the annunciation of God who seeks to live like a man while teaching that man must seek to live like God. This type of annunciation of God is present in this play.

The main source of the play is Oscar Wilde's story, entitled The Doer of the Good. It was narrated to Yeats by an actor.⁷⁷ Calvary dramatizes man's indifference to God, not through a well-made story, but through a series of situations dealing with the confrontation of Christ with personalities he cannot save. First to confront with Christ is Lazarus who had died, but now brought back by Christ in an attempt to give him life. But Lazarus, on the other hand wants his death back because 'alive he could never escape

77. W.B. Yeats, Autobiographies, p.286.

Christ's love.' So he claims his right to die. the next is Judas, Christ's betrayer, who sold Christ for thirty pieces of silver. In his long conversation with Christ, he says that he betrayed him to gain his superiority over God and assert his individuality: "if a man betrays a God, he is stronger of the two."⁷⁸ He proudly declares: "You cannot even save me."⁷⁹ Last to have confrontation with Christ are the three Roman soldiers. They tell us, that they are the gamblers, who plan to decide, by throwing the dice, as to who is to get the cloak of Christ when the latter is dead. They too are indifferent to Christ's power, and are satisfied with their fortune. Thus Christ is left alone, pathetically pleading, "My father, why hast thou forsaken me."⁸⁰ These episodes thus depict the helplessness of Christ to save those whom he wanted to save, and his eventual loneliness. Yeats has treated this idea in the Noh technique.

Here all the characters are masked, or wear such make-up on their faces that looks like the mask. The stage, like the stage of the preceding play, is a "bare place, round three sides of which the audience are seated."⁸¹ Here as in the

78. W.B. Yeats, Collected Plays, p.454.

79. Ibid., p.455.

80. Ibid.

81. Ibid., p.449.

Noh plays, the audience sit forming a circle. The play begins with the characteristic folding and unfolding of the cloth by the Musicians accompanied by a song. This song refers to the theme of solitude, and self-absorption. The next lines of the first Musician introduce us to Christ, who is the central character. He is described here as dreaming his passion through carrying a cross. The lines. "Now he stands amid the mocking crowd,"⁸² and the lines which follow refer to Christ's helplessness and to the failure of Christianity. This has been conveyed through the crowd jeering at him. The song thus introduces the main idea which the play dramatizes. Here Yeats has used the conventional technique of flashback, in Christ's dreaming his passion through. Peter Ure remarks that Yeats has used this technique "in order to make the suffering remote rather than actual."⁸³ After this, the speech of the Musician announces the coming of the next character who is described as frightening with 'deathly face,' who moves "like a young foal that sees the hunt go by/ And races in the field."⁸⁴ The conventional device of arousing curiosity through suspense is seen here. Here just the physical appearance has been described and no names are given. Immediately

82. Ibid., p.450.

83. Peter Ure, Yeats the Playwright, p.117.

84. W.B. Yeats, Collected Plays, p.451.

after this we are told that "a player with the mask of Lazarus has entered."⁸⁵ Thus the deathly face, just mentioned, has been identified here as Lazarus. Technically he has been individualized by the description of his physique and by his name. While in Christ's case we find no such individualization, because he stands for an idea.

Then a long conversation between Christ and Lazarus follows which reveals all that had happened between them. Here we come to know that Lazarus had died, and was lying peacefully in his grave. But Christ raised him up, dragging him to light. Lazarus, thus deprived of his death, claims his right to die, and even seeks Christ's death in exchange. He now asks for death because: "Alive he never could escape his love."⁸⁶ He further gives us reasons for his death wish:

I thought to die
And that, being gone, you could not hinder it;
But now you will blind with light the solitude
That death has made; you will disturb that corner
Where I thought I might lie safe for ever.⁸⁷

Here there is a reference to the failure of Christianity to such an extent that people instead of finding any solace in it, want to escape it, finding it as a hindrance to their self-centredness. Death is preferable to religion. Then we have the first Musician's speech. This

85. Ibid.

86. Ibid., p.452.

87. Ibid.

prepares us for the entrance of the next character on the stage. He is depicted as "The face that seems death-stricken and death-hungry still."⁸⁸ A sense of fear is associated with this yet unidentified character. This sense of fear is further conveyed in the following lines of Christ:

Why has the street grown empty of a sudden
As though all fled in terror?⁸⁹

Soon this character comes on the stage, and tells us that he is called Judas, and that he had sold Christ for thirty pieces of silver. So like Lazarus, Judas has also been individualized 'as the face that seems death-stricken and death-hungry.' Then in the following long argument between Christ and him, more light is thrown upon Judas. We are told that the reason behind his betraying Christ was that he wanted to become more powerful than Christ and wanted to assert his individuality and his own identity. His belief was "whatever man betrays him will be free."⁹⁰ After this we see that the "three Roman soldiers have entered."⁹¹ The first soldier comes and speaks. Here unlike the case of Lazarus and Judas we find that no attempt has been made to individualize them. This shows that Yeats was using a mixed

88. Ibid., p.453.

89. Ibid.

90. Ibid., p.454.

91. Ibid., p.455.

technique for characterization, which is a fusion of the Noh and the Conventional devices. The stage direction says, "Judas holds up the cross while Christ stands with his arms stretched out upon it."⁹² Here there is a long discussion that is chiefly among these three soldiers, with just two lines uttered by Christ, in which we are told that these soldiers are gamblers who intend to take away Christ's cloak. They are throwing their dice, to decide as to who is going to possess this cloak. The rest of the conversation shows their indifference towards any religion, and their contentment with their present fate. They are just gamblers, but fully satisfied with their fate asking nothing of Christ. Then we see the Roman soldiers dancing. Christ is now left all alone. Regretting his plight he says: "My father, why hast thou forsaken me."⁹³ The play, conforming to the Noh technique, ends with the song of the Chorus, for the folding and unfolding of the cloth. The song again emphasizes Christ's loneliness, and failure through the loneliness of the birds:

Lonely the sea-bird lies at her rest,

 The lake is empty; why do they fling
 White wing out beside white wing?
 What can a swan need but a swan.⁹⁴

92. Ibid.

93. Ibid.

94. Ibid., p.457.

Here Ashley Myles's comment is noteworthy. He says "It is then left to the Musicians to recapture the theme of the first lyric with a series of bird images like 'lonely sea-bird,' 'Cygnats,' 'Swan,' etc., and the second Musician enchants by his choric repetitions, 'God has not appeared to the bird.,"⁹⁵ "Birds are the symbols of the same sense of Isolation from which the people who spurn Salvation suffer."⁹⁶

The above analysis makes it clear that the play intends to present the failure of Christianity, conveyed to us through the failure of Christ who is shown here as suffering at the cross, left all alone. Different critics have given different interpretations of the play. For example, Moore holds that "Christ's Calvary consists in the discovery of the limits of His power, even when that power is conceived as universal love. The saviour is impotent to impose his unity on the recalcitrant duality of the world."⁹⁷ Norman Jafferres believes that "Christ's agony in the play is the agony of the man forced to relive, in the act of 'dreaming his passion through,' the consequences of His reincarnation, which includes his involvement in the world that is opposed to him. In Yeats's terminology he is

95. Ashley Myles, A study of W.B.Yeats as a Dramatist, p.86.

96. B.N.Chaturvedi, Early Twentieth Century Poetic Drama, p.21.

97. J.R.Moore, Masks of Love and Death, Yeats as a Dramatist, p.231.

'out of phase,' thrust into an hostile world which, though he has created, he cannot affect"⁹⁸ Rajan, opines that "the play is not necessarily an exposure of the failure of christianity, but it is certainly a reminder that there will be many who require a different faith."⁹⁹

However, some critics see the play in terms of Yeats's philosophy of the subjective and the objective aspect of personality. For example, Vendler says, "the play is concerned with the interaction of objective and subjective life, the double interlocking of gyres. In other words Judas cannot get free of Christ, nor can soliders' indifference release them from Him; nor can He escape the consequences of His own actions."¹⁰⁰ It is essential opines Yeats: "to bear in mind the double nature of Christ, as man and as God. As God Christ is primary As man Christ is antithetical. Yeats once wrote about Christ that: we say of him because his sacrifice was voluntary that He was love itself, and yet that part of Him which made Christendom was not love but pity, not pity or intellectual despair... but primary pity that for the common lot, man's death, seeing that He raised Lazarus, sickness seeing that He healed many, sin, seeing that He died."¹⁰¹ Ashley Myles also, thinking along these lines, says "the play represents the eternal conflict

98. A.Norman Jafferes and A.S.Knowland, eds., A Comentary on the Collected Plays of W.B. Yeats, pp.168-9.

99. B. Rajan, W.B. Yeats:A Critical Introduction, pp.101-3.

100. H. Vendler, Yeats's Vision (Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 1963), p.172.

101. W.B. Yeats, A Vision (B), p.275.

between the subjective and objective man.¹⁰² Anniah Gowda suggesting this says "Yeats used the bird-symbolism to emphasise the objective loneliness of Christ in His suffering on the cross."¹⁰³

Here the conflict between the subjective and the objective aspects is too strong to be overlooked. Both the failure of Christ and this conflict have been fused to dramatize the defeat of Christ, his powerlessness that eventually corresponds to the failure of Christianity in Europe in our own age. As Yeats himself says "I use birds as symbol of subjective life... Such lonely birds as the heron, hawks, eagle and swan are the natural symbols of subjectivity, especially when floating upon the winds alone or alighting upon some pool, while the beasts that run upon the ground, especially those that run in packs, are the natural symbols of the objective man."¹⁰⁴ Yeats has said,

I have used my bird symbolism in these songs to increase the objective loneliness of Christ by contrasting it with a loneliness, opposite in kind, that unlike His can be, whether joyous or sorrowful, sufficient to itself. I have surrounded Him with the images of those He cannot save,.... I have therefore represented in Lazarus and Judas types of that intellectual despair that lay beyond His sympathy, while in the Roman soldiers I suggest a form of objectivity that lay beyond His help.¹⁰⁵

102. Ashley Myles, A Study of W.B. Yeats as a Dramatist, p.87.

103. Anniah Gowda, A Revival of English Poetic Drama, pp.232-3.

104. W.B. Yeats, Plays and Controversies, pp.458-9.

105. Ibid., p.459.

Peter Ure says: "In Calvary both Judas and Lazarus are conceived as relics of the elder civilization; they do not want to be completely God's object but to remain themselves."¹⁰⁶ One more point, not noticed by these critics, is Yeats's concept of history and objective cycle of civilization present here, based on Madam Blavatsky's philosophy that "divided the interminable period of human existence on this planet into cycles, during each of which mankind gradually reached the culminating point of highest civilization and gradually relapsed into abject barbarism."¹⁰⁷ Yeats's own concept is of slow degeneration into abstraction, having attained the unity of culture. So finally the cycle reaches total violence. Viewed in these terms the play seems to depict this final state of violence.

The play has been rendered in the Noh technique, with all the formal characteristics of the Noh pattern such as the bare stage, masked actors, symbols, songs of the Musicians, and the concluding dance. We also have an iterative image-clusters of birds and animals which Yeats regarded as one of the principal devices of the Noh technique. All the images are very appropriate, that lead to the development or heightening of the plot. All of them imply the sense of Christ's loneliness which is the central

106. Peter Ure, Yeats the Playwright, p.120.

107. H.P.Blavatsky, Isis Unveiled (London : Macmillan, 1910), I.5.

action of the play. Conforming to the Noh pattern here all the characters have been introduced by the Musicians. However, all of them, except christ, have been particularized by the description of their physique in a conventional manner. Their long speeches reveal their individuality. Again the character contrast between christ and others conforms to the conventional pattern. While Christ represents the objective aspect of personality, seeking to change everything in his own image, others represent subjectivity as they are self-centred and content on their solitude.

One criticism that the play carries is that it lacks any single action. Peter Ure, for example, says that "the play has no single central action, as The Dreaming of the Bones has, nor structural core, as The Words Upon the Window Pane and Purgatory have..., and there is no 'working to a climax.'"¹⁰⁸ But we can say that the play, as most of the critics do admit, is a play of ideas. Its main appeal is to the mind and not to the eye or the ear. Rajan rightly states that "Calvary uses Noh form for something approaching a drama of ideas. However, its development is not argumentative; the positions presented in it are related to each other, rather than modified by a debate and the whole has to be held in mind and played back for its structure to be confirmed."¹⁰⁹

108. Peter Ure, Yeats the Playright, p.117.

109. B. Rajan, W.B. Yeats: A Critical Introduction, p.103.

CHAPTER - V

THE LAST PHASE

The plays that form the post-Noh phase of Yeats dramatic career are : The King of the Great Cloak Tower, A Full Moon in March, The Herne's Egg, The words Upon the Window Pane, Purgatory and The Death of Cuchulain. Besides the two prose plays The Cat and the Moon and The Ressurrection, the plays that immediately preceded the Four Plays for Dancers were also included in this phase. All these plays are philosophical in their content and put forth Yeats's philosophy of life, death and after-life in the guise of some Irish myth. They also convey some of Yeats's acutest criticism of life. In matters of technique, they show Yeats's continuing experimental nature. But mainly they are based on the Noh pattern though in a modified way, in the sense that they are not drawing-room performances but public-performances. Like the Noh plays, these last plays are also symbolic, and use a bare, suggestive stage setting.

I

THE CAT AND THE MOON

The Cat and the Moon, (1917) is the immediate successor of Four Plays for Dancers. Yeats had thought of including it in this group as interlude between At the Hawk's Well and The Dreaming of the Bones, but, because of its different mood, he dropped this idea. The play now represents

a transitional period between his Noh and the Post- Noh phase, in the sense that, though its technique follows the typical Noh pattern, thematically a turn towards post-Noh phase is noticeable. The play is of occult character and satirizes the friendship between George Moore and Edward Martin. But the play along with the poem of the same title goes back to his philosophy of the phases of the Moon explained in A Vision. Its title is based on Yeats's belief that pupil of the cat's eye changes with the phase of the Moon, as its introduction in Wheels and Butterflies certifies. Here Yeats, making new suggestions about the sources of the sun and the moon symbolism, says :

Perhaps some early Christian Bardiason had speculations about the sun and the man nobody seems to have investigated, and thought as I do, saw in the changes of the Moon all the cycles; the soul realising its separate being in the full moon, then, as the moon seems to approach the sun... all but realising its absorption in God, only to whirl away once more, the mind of a man.¹

Yeats here also goes back to his philosophy of mask. In fact while writing it, he thought of "eat as the normal man and moon as the opposite he seeks perpetually."² According

1. W.B.Yeats, Wheels and Butterflies, p. 138.

2. Ibid.

to Yeats's system of the moon's circle, the spiritual monad moved from the crescent to the full moon - the phase of complete subjectivity and then back to the full dark, the phase of complete objectivity. Yeats has further said about the play the "Mannalaushe and the moon were perhaps... an exposition of man's relation to what I called the antithetical tincture, and when the saint mounts upon the back of the lame Baggar he personifies a certain great spiritual event that may take place when Primary tincture supercedes Antithetical."³

The play puts forth this philosophy in the guise of a fable dealing with a Blind Beggar a lame Beggar and a supernatural well, popular among Irish men. This well was popular as a miraculous one. The play thus accords with his aim to "give a Gaelic League ... a model for little plays, commemoration of the known little places and events, and some light entertainment to join a couple of dance plays, and chose for theme the lame man, the blind man and the well."⁴

The play dramatizes the story of a Blind and a lame Beggar, of whom come both Saint Colman's well in order to be blessed. Both have come with different aims. The lame Beggar wants just to be blessed and says: "It would be a grand

3. See A.N.Jafferes and A.S.Knowland, eds., A Commentary on the Collected Plays of W.B.Yeats, p. 172.

4. W.B.Yeats, Wheels and Butterflies, p. 138.

thing to have two legs under me, but... it would be grander to have my name in that book."⁵ But the Blind Beggar wants his eyesight. Both get what they desire. However as soon as the Blind Beggar gets his eyesight and is able to see, he thrashes the lame Beggar and goes away. At this cruelty against the lame Beggar, the Saint pitying his condition makes the lame Beggar able to walk, besides blessing him. After this we see the lame Beggar carrying the Saint on his back. Here Yeats remarks: "when the lame Beggar takes the Saint on his back, the normal man had become one with its opposite."⁶

The stage and scenery, like that of the Four Plays for Dancers is "any bare place before a wall against which stands a patterned screen, suggesting St. Calman's well. Three Musicians are sitting close to the wall, with zither, drum and flute. Their faces are made up to resemble masks."⁷ The play begins with the first Musician's song referring to the imagery of the cat and the moon. As the song ends, two Beggars -- a Blind Beggar and a lame Beggar on the back of the Blind Beggar come on the stage. Both are wearing grotesque masks. Through their ensuing conversation we come to know that they both are in search of St. Colman's well though for different purposes. Here they also refer to the concept of their independence, one being indispensable for the other.

5. W.B. Yeats, Collected Plays, p. 467.

6. W.B. Yeats, Letters to the New Island, p.232.

7. W.B. Yeats, Collected Plays, p. 461.

The lame Beggar says : "when you go out to pick up a chicken or may be a stray goose on the road, I have to go riding on your back; and if I want a goose... I must have your two legs under me."⁸ While they are talking the first Musician comes and says : "will you be cured or will you be blessed."⁹ The lame Beggar immediatly identifies that it is the Saint's voice but he cannot see the Saint. The first Musician repeats his question and the Blind Beggar replies : "I shall be cured of my blindness."¹⁰ He justifies his wish saying that : "Those that have their sight are always stealing my thing and telling me lies, so don't take it bad of me, Holy man, that I ask the sight of my two eyes."¹¹ The first Musician puts the same question to the lame Beggar and tells him that "If blessed he would be of the kin of the blessed Saints and of the martyrs."¹² Now the lame Beggar replies that if so, then he would like to be blessed for "It would be a grand thing to have two legs under me, but I have it in my mind that it would be a grander thing to have my name in that book. I stay lame, Holy Man, and I will be blessed."¹³ The wishes of both the Beggars are soon

8. Ibid., p. 463.

9. Ibid., p. 466.

10. Ibid.

11. Ibid., p. 467.

12. Ibid.

13. Ibid.

fulfilled as the Saint gives eyesight to the Blind Beggar and blessing to the lame Beggar. Now the Blind Beggar is able to see all around himself which makes him very happy, but he cannot see the Holy Man, visible to the lame Beggar. It is so, because the lame Beggar is blessed.

After this we see that the Blind Beggar as he gets his eyesight beats the lame beggar and goes away. The lame Beggar on the other hand is seen carrying the Saint on his back because the latter asked him to do so. Though the lame Beggar tells the Saint that his legs will not be able to bear the Saint's weight on his back, later on he feels as if he has none on his back because he is now blessed. The Holy Man also asks the lame Beggar to dance, which shocks the latter. But the Holy Man tells the lame Beggar that he can dance because he is blessed. The lame Beggar starts dancing and feels clumsy in the beginning but soon he throws away his stick and begins to dance very quickly. The play ends with the song of the first Musician :

Minnaloushe creeps through the grass. Alone,
And lifts to the changing moon
His changing eyes.¹⁴

The play illustrates Yeats's philosophy of A Vision and confirms his continuing interest in Irish subject matter.

14. Ibid, p. 472.

A.N.Jafferes has pointed out that the play is based on the story of the 'Blindman and the Cripple' in The Arabian Nights.¹⁵ Though Yeats claims to have found these two symbolic figures (Blindman and Lame man) in some medieval Irish sermon, the words he echoes are the same as used by Burton in his book The Thousand Nights and a Night. The Saint, the Blind Man, the Lame Man, all are in one way related to their counterparts in Arabian Nights. However, its philosophy remains unambiguous. Yeats sees the Blind Man and the Lame Man as a body and a soul.¹⁶ They also seem to have a similar meaning in a Buddhist Sutra. This idea of Yeats also conforms to the christian thought. Yeats says that : "Perhaps some early Christian-Bardaisan had speculations about the sun and the moon."¹⁷ The play, apparently a simple story, takes us beyond the veil into some inner region. To quote K.Worth "these two (the lame Man and the Blind Man) like the holy man and the lecher, make up a whole life: indeed from the first moment of their entry, one riding on the other's back, the idea of what Becket calls a pseudo-couple is with us."¹⁸

The characters, though wearing grotesque masks, have their own personality. The Blind Beggar is practical but the Lame Beggar is fanciful and unreliable. This is why when asked

15. See A.N. Jafferes, ed., In Excited Reverie, p. 313.

16. See W.B. Yeats, Explorations, p. 402.

17. W.B. Yeats, Wheels and Butterflies, p. 138.

18. Katharine Worth, The Irish Drama of Europe, p. 192.

by the Holy Man whether he would like to be blessed or cured of his blindness he at once responds that he wants to get his eyesight. The Lame Beggar on the other hand wants to be blessed rather than get his two legs. So both have different attitudes towards life.

Technically, the play follows the Noh-pattern in its use of dance, mask, song etc. It also begins and ends with the ceremony of folding and unfolding of the cloth. Its opening and end are related by the first Musician's lyric celebrating the image of Cat and Moon :

Minnaloushe Creeps through the grass.
Alone, important and wise,
And lifts to the changing moon
His changing eyes.¹⁹

Yeats conceived of this play "to be what the Japanese call a 'Kiogen' (brief farces in the colloquial language introduced early in the development of the Noh drama as interludes between the more serious ritualistic plays)."²⁰ For K.Worth "It has that special value among the dance plays and a popular quality, which... connects Yeats with writers like Sean O'Casey and Arden."²¹ But here Yeats, unlike the Four Plays for Dancers, prefers prose to verse.

19.W.B.Yeats,Collected Plays, p. 472.

20.W.B.Yeats's note to 'Cat and the Moon,' in A.S. Knowland and A.N.Jafferes, eds., A Commentary on the Collected Plays of W.B.Yeats, p. 172.

21.Katharine Worth , The Irish Drama of Europe, p. 183.

Theatrically, the play is simple but highly suggestive. However, the play lacks human emotions and dramatic conflicts. Even the characters are reduced to ideas and cease to be solid figures. The story element is scanty, characterisation unprofound and language prosaic, but the philosophic content is unmistakably clear.

II

The Ressurrection

The Ressurrection, (1931) like The Cat and the Moon, is the immediate successor of The Four Plays for Dancers. In its dramatization of Christ's crucifixion it resembles Calvary but is an advance upon Calvary both in its theme and its technique. As regards its theme, Yeats wrote : "The slain God, the risen God, forms the subject of both The Ressurrection and The King of the Great Cloak Tower."²² Like the other plays of the last phase of Yeats's dramaturgy The Ressurrection is overtly philosophical. The play dramatizes the myth of reincarnation : "The immortals are mortals, the mortals immortals, each living the other's death and dying the other's life."²³ These words are central to the play. But here Yeats has linked this myth with his own concept of the cyclical movement of the history of human civilization explained in A Vision. Interwoven in this is

22. W.B.Yeats, Letters, pp. 826-7.

23. See W.B.Yeats's 'Paraphrase of Hiraclilus' Words' in his Journal of 1908 quoted in Curtis Bradfords, Yeats At Work (London:Macmillan, 1965), p. 266.

the concept of subjectivity and objectivity. This concept of a new civilization is related to the myth of reincarnation. To quote Rajan "The Ressurrection, likewise is based on the conflict between the two principles or elemental forms of the mind that whirl perpetually, creating and recreating all things."²⁴ Yeats himself has stated that "there was everywhere a conflict like that of my play between the two principles or elemental forms of mind, each living the other's life, dying the other's death."²⁵

The play depicts the events that occurred just after Christ's crucifixion. The play has two main characters -- the Hebrew, a subjective man like Judas, and the Greek, a representative of the dying classical civilization and builder of order and of cities. Both talk of different attitudes towards Christ. In between their conversation are heard the cries of the worshippers of Dionysus on the street, who have just returned after burying their God and are now waiting for his resurrection. At this time Syrian, the next character of the play, comes on the stage, informing them of the vacant tomb of Christ to confirm which he was sent by the Hebrew and the Greek. While they are arguing this topic, Christ, wearing a stylized yet recognizable mask, appears on the stage. After this we see a

24. B.Rajan, Yeats: A Critical Introduction, p. 156.

25. W.B.Yeats, Wheels and Butterflies, pp. 104-9.

dance conforming to the climactic moment of revelation and spiritual enlightenment, we have seen in the Noh-plays. At last the three Musicians capture the final mood of the play.

The play opens with the folding and unfolding of the cloth accompanied by the Musician's song. Here the symbol of the beating heart is very significant because it hints at the central theme of the play that is decay and birth of a civilization. Here the rise and fall of the heart suggests this. As this song ends the Hebrew carrying a sword and a spear comes on the stage, followed by the entry of the Greek through the audience. In the conversation that follows between them they talk about Christ's crucifixion and his resurrection. Both present different arguments. Their conversation is interrupted by the noise on the street made by the followers of Dionysus. But the Hebrew and the Greek continue their conversation about Christ. The Hebrew says that he is just like those dogs that have lost their masters. Then he admits to have seen Christ already buried. But the Greek holds that Christ being a God cannot be buried : "No god has ever been buried; no god has ever suffered. Christ only seemed to be born, only seemed to sleep, seemed to walk, seemed to die."²⁶ But to the Hebrew faith in Messiah means the surrender of all dear things in

26. W.B.Yeats, Collected Plays, p. 583.

life. He feels afraid of God taking total possession of him. His point of view is evident in these lines :

One had to sacrifice everything that the divine suffering might, as it were descend into one's mind and soul and make them pure. One had to give up all worldly knowledge, all ambition, do nothing of one's own will.²⁷

According to him Christ is just an ordinary man who preached the coming of the Messiah before he thought that Messiah would take it all upon himself. The Hebrew here tells the Greek that he saw Christ 'carried up the mountain and the tomb shut upon him.' Again they hear the shouts of the worshippers of Dionysus, who represent the symptoms of violent disorder, which heralds the death of a cycle of civilization.

The third character in the play, the Syrian, puts in his appearance at this juncture. He was sent by the Hebrew and the Greek to confirm the rumour about Christ's resurrection. He now returns with the news that Christ's tomb was empty and that "At the door stood a man all shining, and cried out that Christ has arisen."²⁸ This is followed by a discussion over knowledge. The rationalistic definition given by the Greek is that knowledge is something that stands between us

27. Ibid., p. 585.

28. Ibid., p. 589.

and the barbarian. But the Syrian, a real believer in God, contradicts this rationalism of the Greek arguing :

What if there is always something that lies outside knowledge, outside order? What if at the moment when knowledge and order seem complete that something appears.²⁹

He looks at everything like a mystic.

The play reaches its climax with the appearance of Christ, wearing a recognizable but stylised mask. This figure of Christ without flesh or blood has a heart beating inside the apparition, as the Greek feels it when he touches it. Now the Greek becomes sure that the end of the old order has come and that "God and man die each other's life, live each other's death."³⁰ After this occurs a climactic dance in the characteristic Noh manner. Miner in this regard says that "Behind this moment lies the whole weight of some of Yeats's most compelling poems of the meeting place where they live, where the God achieves a human body."³¹ In the end the Musicians capture the final mood of the play. So we see that the Greek represents the dying civilization, the Hebrew subjectivity while the Dionysian revellers a foul symptom of disorder, and the trio taken

29. Ibid., p.591.

30. Ibid., p.594.

31. E. Miner, The Japanese Tradition in British and American Literature (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1958), p.80.

together suggest one force, opposed to the Christian group.

Besides presenting Yeats's concept of reincarnation, the play shows Yeats's search for the cultural unity that he also explored in the preceding Noh plays. To highlight this theme of reincarnation and the birth of a new era, Yeats has used an image of the beating heart taken from an English physicist and chemist William Crooks. He wrote: "Years ago I read William Crookes's 'Studies in Physical Research', found the heart beating... I took from the beating heart, from the shock of man of science, the central situation of my play the young man touching the heart of phantom and screaming. It has seemed to me of late that the sense of spiritual reality comes... from some violent shock, and that idea has the support of tradition."³² The Play presents not an ordinary story dealing with human experiences and emotions appealing to the common men but some abstract reality, a philosophical point of view of life.

As regards its technique, this play, despite Yeats's intentions to use the conventional devices, fully corresponds with the Noh-technique. Yeats wrote: "I had begun with an ordinary stage in the mind's eye, curtained walls, a window and a door at back... I now changed the stage direction and wrote some songs for the folding and

32. W.B. Yeats, Wheels and Butterflies, pp.109-10.

unfolding of the curtain that it might be played in a studio or drawing room like my dance plays."³³ The play, though related to Calvary, shows an advance upon it, since it is not static like Calvary nor a mere bundle of three episodes, but has a sequence of events followed by a climax making it dramatically more effective. Its climax seems to occur in a typical Noh manner with the revelation of the real nature of God. This play also uses dialogue, action, dance, songs, mask etc., all the ingredients of Noh-technique. According to Miner, the dance in the play "most clearly indicates its structural affinity with the climatic moments of revelations and spiritual enlightenment found in the Noh."³⁴ According to Peter Ure, this play along with The Words Upon the Window Pane is unexpected achievement in the excellent success with which Yeats here has turned the tables on the naturalistic drama, which he always disliked by exploring it from inside that "both use their naturalistic scene and dialogue merely as containers to hold reality's flaming torch... from its smoking ruins arises the terrible image of an utterly different kind of life."³⁵ Indeed its climax in the dance and lyric makes it a drama which otherwise would have been a mere debate.

33. Quoted in Ashley Myles, Theatre of Aristocracy A Study of W.B. Yeats as a Dramatist, p. 90.

34. E. Miner, The Japanese Tradition in British and American Literature, p.260.

35. Peter Ure, Yeats, pp. 98-9.

III

THE WORDS UPON THE WINDOW PANE

The Words Upon the Window Pane was written towards the close of 1930s. Like the other plays of the last phase, this play, too, is based on the concept of dreaming back. Here Yeats, as in The Dreaming of the Bones, seems to condense into a single moment a revelation of the essence of human life with the help of memory. This corresponds to Yeats's faith in the mediumistic function as essentially a dramatization of the dead mind and also shows Swedenborgian influence on Yeats. Yeats believed that "this earth resembling life is the creation of the image-making power of the mind, plucked naked from the body."³⁶ Similarly, Swedenborg, according to Yeats, believed that we forget nothing though we can't recall all. So the souls in this or after life might create the reconstruction of experiences, if assisted by the imagination and angelic spirits. The play elucidates Yeats's concept that "at the need angelic spirits who act upon us there as here,... can draw forth the past, and make us live again all our transgressions and see our victims as if they were present together with the places, words and motives... when a scene bursts upon the sight and continues for hours... all the pleasures and pains of sensible life awaken again and again, not as seeming imagination. For imagination is a world now."³⁷ This is something like a

36. W.B. Yeats, Essays, p.. 34-35.

37. Ibid.

phantasmagoria, and corresponds to the idea contained in 'The Soul in Judgement' in A Vision. It reads like this: "Sometimes a spirit re-lives not the pain of death but some passionate or tragic events of life."³⁸ and that "in the Dreaming-Back, the Spirit is compelled to live over and over again the events that had most moved it."³⁹ These experiences according to Yeats are not mere hallucinations but vivid and palpable.

In the Introduction to the present play Yeats has explained these experiences investigating psychic phenomena as follows:

I consider it certain that every voice that speaks, every form that appears, whether to the medium's eyes and ears alone, whether it remains a sight or sound or affects the sense of touch, is first of all a secondary personality or dramatization created by, in, or through the medium.⁴⁰

The present play fully accords with Yeats's belief in magic, evocation of the spirit and many other magical practices explained in Essays and Introductions.⁴¹ The play depicts the picture of suffering Swift while explaining a Seance in the Dublin lodging house. The members of Dublin Spiritualists's Association have gathered here to summon Swift's spirit through Mrs. Henderson, the medium.

38. W.B. Yeats, A Vision (A), pp.219-40 and 282-6.

39. Ibid., (B) p.226.

40. W.B. Yeats, Essays, p.364.

41. W.B. Yeats, Essays and Introductions, p.28.

The play through Mrs. Henderson's words reveals the tragedy of Swift's life. We see Swift as being under the influence of arrogant intellect, afraid of parenthood, of the fate of future generations, and of historical changes. We also hear Swift's word reprimanding Vannesa, who was Stella's rival for Swift's love. Then we see him referring to the sentiments expressed by Stella in her poem written on Swift's fifty-fourth birth day (indicated in the play's title)

You taught how I might my youth prolong
By knowing what is right or wrong.⁴²

We see that the play deals with Swift's purgatory shown to us through Mrs. Henderson, the medium. The central theme of the play is hinted by Dr. Trench, the president of this Association :

The spirits are the people like ourselves; sometimes the spirit re-lives not the pain of death but some passionate or tragic moment of life.⁴³

The play opens in the house of Stella's friend. The stage setting of the play is modern and naturalistic, with "a lodging house room, an armchair, a little table in front of it, chairs on either side. A kettle on the table bob and some tea things on a dresser."⁴⁴ In this house a meeting of

42. W.B. Yeats, Collected Plays, p. 601.

43. Ibid., p. 603-4.

44. Ibid., p. 597.

the members of the Dublin Spiritualist's Association with Dr. Trench, its president, and Miss. Mickenna, its secretary has been arranged. They have assembled to summon the spirit of Swift through Mrs. Henderson, the medium. Other characters engaged in this are Patterson, Johnson and Mrs. Mallet. First to appear is Dr. Trench, who introduces John Corbet of Cambridge to us, who is busy in writing a thesis on Swift. Then Dr. Trench introduces Miss Mickenna to us, who mentions Mrs Henderson as lying down. A little later Dr. Trench tells us "that this house in the early part of the eighteenth century belonged to the friends of Jonathan Swift, or rather of Stella."⁴⁵ Dr. Trench also shows us John Corbet's lines from Stella's poem on the fifty fourth birthday of Swift that are inscribed on the window pane of the house.

Afterwards Miss. Mickenna and Abraham Johnson enter this lodging house looking for Mrs. Henderson, and tell us that a Seance is about to be started because of which they are in search of Mrs. Henderson, the medium. Then John Corbet speaks and recalls the past life of Swift :

How strange that a Celibate Scholar, well on in life, should keep the love of two such women! He met Vanessa in London at the height of his political power. She loved him for nine years, perhaps died of love, but

45. Ibid., p. 599.

Stella loved him all her life.⁴⁶

Here John Corbet also boasts of the political scene of Ireland during Swift's life. He tells us that at that time men attained the heights of their political power. His words that "everythig great in Ireland and in our character, comes from that day,"⁴⁷ show Yeast's own admiration for the eighteenth century Ireland when Swift lived. Next Dr.Trench and John Corbet talk about the tragedy of Swift's private life. They tell us how he was banished and ruined by own friends and allgreat ministers. Swift's ideal men were Brutus and Cato whose death he foresaw in the French Revolution. Swift thus did not like the common people and wrote Gulliver, out of frustration. Then John Corbet says that Swift "has gone where Fierce indignation can lacerate his heart no more."⁴⁸ After this Abraham, Mr. Mallet and patterson put in their appearance. In the conversation between Dr. Trench and Abraham we are told that Abraham's profession is to organise Seances. Then Mrs. Mallet speaks and explainshow the dead dream back and how she communicates with her dead husband constantly through Mrs. Henderson as if he were alive. Dr. Trench also says that "The spirits are people like ourselves, we treat them as our guests.

46. Ibid., p. 601.

47. Ibid.

48. ibid., p. 602.

Some spirits are earth-bound they think they are still living and do over and over some action of their past lives. For instance, when a spirit which has died a violent death comes to a medium for the first time it re-lives all the pains of death."⁴⁹ After this Mrs. Henderson accompanied by Miss. Meckenna enters the scene, and tells us that these people are about to call some spirit. We see Mrs. Henderson leaning back in her chair asleep and speaking first in a child's voice and then in a man's voice as follows :

How dare you write to her? How dare you ask if we were married? How dare you question her?⁵⁰

Now Dr. Trench tells us that the spirit summoned by Mrs. Henderson at present is a soul in agony. John Corbet clarifies that the spirit summoned is Swift's spirit, who is shown talking to Vanessa. Here Swift, through the medium, is seeking explanation of Vanessa's conduct in writing to ask Stella if the latter is Swift's wife. Vanessa in her excuse says that she did so, because of her love for Swift. But Swift tells her that he is determined to remain unmarried being a man of strong passion. Vanessa goes on pleading him to marry her. She also wants to bear his child. Hence she in order to cool Swift's anger makes him touch her body. But Swift tells her that he has some disease in blood which he dose not want to be inherited by his children. He also

49. Ibid., p. 604.

50. Ibid., p. 608.

tells her that he has "constant attacks of dizziness come from a surfeit of fruit when he was a child."⁵¹ Vanessa also realises that it is Swift's arrogant intellect that has separated both of them. She then puts his hand on her breast but soon Swift feels some treachery or evil in her breast. Vanessa thus tries to cajole him and then cries out : "Jonathan no man in Ireland is so passionate. That is why you need me, that is why you need children, nobody has greater need."⁵² She also finds in him fear of loneliness and old age and rebels against his self-control that prevents him to gratify his needs. Swift cries out for God's help to resist this temptation so that " he may leave to posterity nothing but his intellect that came to him from Heaven."⁵³ He also cries out Stella's name when Vanessa has already gone. He now asks Stella (his beloved) if he has ever wronged her or made her unhappy. Then he says that Stella has already answered his questions in her poem that she wrote for Swift's last birthday. In this poem Stella has celebrated Swift's success in fashioning her in the image of his ideal woman. She writes :

You taught how I might youth prolong
By knowing what is right or wrong;
How from my heart to bring supplies
Of luster to my fading eyes;⁵⁴

51. *Ibid.*, p.609.

52. *Ibid.*, p. 610.

53. *Ibid.*, p.611.

54. *Ibid.*, p.613.

Swift appreciates Stella in realising his loneliness. In this poem Stella has also overpraised his moral nature by attributing it to a rich mantle.

Late dying may you cast a shred
Of that rich mantle over my head;
To bear with dignity my sorrow,
One day alone then die tomorrow.⁵⁵

Swift considered Stella as an embodiment of sacred love and not of profane love like Vanessa's. After this Mrs. Henderson, the medium, comes in her own self and speaks in her own voice. Now Dr. Trench comes on the forefront to congratulate her for her remarkable performance. Dr. Trench gives her money for this performance but she refuses to accept it, because according to her it was not a good performance. She calls it a failure. However, when all tell her that they are fully satisfied she takes this money. Then there is a conversation between Mrs. Henderson and John Corbet that highlights that Swift was a man of intellect of his epoch. They tell us that Swift foresaw its decay and degeneration and the coming of democracy. John Corbet asks Mrs. Henderson if it was because of this that Swift refused to beget children. But Mrs. Henderson says that she knows nobody called Swift. However, soon she is reminded of Swift. She now calls him a dirty old man :

55. Ibid.

I saw him very clearly just as I woke up. His clothes were dirty, his face covered with boils. Some disease had made his eyes swell up, it stood out of his face like a hen's egg.⁵⁶

John Corbet thinks that all this was because Swift's friends deserted him and his wife Stella had been dead a long time. Again Dr. Trench comes and asks John Corbet and others to leave Mrs. Henderson alone because she is tired. Mrs. Henderson all alone speaks in Swift's voice and says "Perish the day on which I was born!"⁵⁷ with these lines the play comes to an end. The play thus revolves round Swift's life. Here Yeats's dramatization of Swift as a tragic figure conforms to Yeats's knowledge of the private life of Swift. Here Yeats seems to have interpreted Swift's tragedy in his own terms, which shows his own love for such Seances. Dr. Trench one of its characters, explaining the nature of the world of spirits, says:

Sometimes a spirit re-lives not the pain of death but some passionate or tragic moment of life.... The murderer repeats his murder, the robber his robbery, the soldier hears the trumpet once again. If I were a Catholic I would say that such spirits were in purgatory.⁵⁸

The play also highlights Yeats's admiration for the 18th

56. Ibid., p.616.

57. Ibid., p.617.

58. Ibid., p.604.

century Anglo-Irish period to which Swift belonged. Yeats's dramatization of Swift conforms to Yeats's knowledge as to which concept of national life was liked most. But tragically he found this national ideal already dead with no hopes of its revival. Here the image of scorn, defeat and bitterness that filled Yeats's imagination imply the still unresolved political life of Ireland.

Technically, the play in its economy, its dramatic structure and the stage time with which Yeats has presented so intricate a mind as Swift's, engulfed in the labyrinth of guilt of its own devising, shows Yeats's mastery of dramatic art. The play also resembles several of Yeats's dance plays that invite the audience to enjoy a drama by engaging with it in creating a relation, calling it all, eye of the mind to penetrate beyond the stylized surface and experience of its metaphysical and symbolic dimensions. In fact here Dr. Trench has the 'inner eye' called vision. Yeats seems to exploit the conventions of stage realism that in the 1930s and 40s were being used in plays dealing with historical subject matter. The play is highly theatrical. To quote Masaru Sekine "purposefully so, the theatricality being metaphorical, symbolic of surreal, psychological metaphysical apprehensions about the process of history that traditional modes of realism cannot readily convey. The flamboyant theatricality of the play is designed rather to

inspire more flexible and imaginative appreciations of Swift as man and author."⁵⁹ Its comic realism, which at that time was the favourite style, is well suited to establish the situation of *Seance* in a comic way to allay suspicions of the audience. All its six characters are wonderful studies, undergoing an occult experience. This play comes closer to Yeats's ideal of drama where character is defined in a moment of passionate intensity. To quote Masaru Sekine "such a drama intrudes here into the comic realist mode, re-possessing the Abbey stage at the first performance with an awesome power that immediately exposes the spiritual triviality of the style it displaces."⁶⁰

VI

A Full Moon in March

A Full Moon in March (1938) is an extension of The King of the Great Cloak Tower. Professor Misra remarks that "these two are really one play, inasmuch as the latter

59. Masaru Sekine, Irish Writers and the Theatre, p. 19.

60. Ibid., p. 22.

A Full Moon in March) is greater and more effective version of the former."⁶¹

The play deals with the story of an unknown ancient Irish Queen of a cruel heart. This Queen used to arrange her ritual of spring every year at the Full Moon in March. This ritual consisted of a song contest. The rule was that a man who sang his passion best would be the Queen's husband. On the other hand, one who displeased her was to be given a severe punishment. The arbiter of taste was the Queen herself, while her heart and the emotive power of the song were to be the sole criterion. The Queen's desire was that the song should be capable of inducing what she called 'the trembling of her sudden limbs'. One of the competitors was a poet named Swineherd who was confident of winning the Queen's heart with his song. Though the Queen warned him, he did not bother and started his song. But the Queen found it insulting to herself and became angry with him. Now the Queen ordered the Swineherd's head to be cut off.

61. K.S. Misra, Twentieth Century Poetic Drama: A Revaluation, p. 423.

But Swineherd even after he was beheaded continued his song. Surprisingly the Queen also started dancing with Swineherd's severed head and placed the head on the throne. The story ends with the conversation between the two Attendants about the strange union of the two. The play depicts this simple love story of the two lovers with a philosophical touch in it.

The play opens not with the folding and unfolding of the cloth but with the appearance of two Attendants on the stage, who act as a prologue. As prologue, they have a brief dialogue establishing that the play's author or director has asked them to improvise a stage. During this they part the inner curtain and sing an old song dealing with the ironies and the changing power of love. As the inner curtain is drawn we see the Queen on the stage followed by the appearance of one more character on the stage, called Swineherd. In the dialogue that follows between the Queen and the Swineherd we are told that this man called the Swineherd has come on the Queen's announcement that:

He that sings you (the Queen) the best shall take you
(the Queen) for a wife. The kingdom is added to the
gift.⁶²

The Queen admits this fact that she swears to marry and

62. W.B. Yeats, Collected Plays, p.623.

crown the man who sings his passion best. She tells him:

Some I reject. Some I have punished for their impudence.
None I abhor can sing.⁶³

But the Swineherd tells her that he has come through all the perils for her sake, with the firm confidence to win her at a full Moon in March. But the Queen again warns him:

I am crueller than solitude, forest or beast.
Some I have killed or maimed
Because their singing put me in a rage
Go before I change. Why do you stand.⁶⁴

But the Swineherd paying no heed to the words of the Queen is lost in the thoughts of his marriage night with her, "imagining all from the first touch and kiss."⁶⁵ He is confident of his victory because he is not scared of the Queen. Now the Queen permits him to sing. The Swineherd begins singing at once: "A song, the night of love,/An ignorant forest and the dung of the swine"⁶⁶, which insults the Queen. Now the Queen immediately leaves the throne and gets down the stage, saying:

I led him, that I might not seem unjust,
From point to point, established in all eyes
That he came hither not to sing but to heap
Complexities of insult upon my head
Send for the headman, Captain of the guard.⁶⁷

63. Ibid.

64. Ibid., p.624.

65. Ibid.

66. Ibid., p.625

67. Ibid.

However she is thankful to the Swineherd because despite all his daring he has not dared ask her to drop her veil and her face is still pure. Still the Queen orders her Attendants to lead him out of the court and bring his severed head. The Swineherd laughs at this and narrates a story of a woman in his country:

That stood all bathed in blood - a drop of blood
Entered her womb and there begat a child.⁶⁸

Further he tells us how this woman sank in a bridal sleep and conceived a child. At this the Queen cries out "O! Foul, Foul, Foul"⁶⁹ and orders him to go away, never to show his face to her. Following this is the two Attendants' song dealing with an ancient Irish Queen that stuck a head upon a stake. As this song ends we see the Queen standing as before, but now holding above her head the severed head of the Swineherd. The ensuing conversation between the two Attendants tells us that the Queen too has started singing the following song:

Child and darling, hear my song,
Never cry I did you wrong;
Cry that wrong came not from me
But my virgin cruelty.⁷⁰

The Queen also begins to dance to the rhythm of the drum taps. While she dances she puts the Swineherd's severed head

68. Ibid., p.626.

69. Ibid.

70. Ibid., p.628.

on the throne. And now the Second Attendant tells us that the severed head of the Swineherd has also started laughing and singing a song of Jack and Jill. After this we see that "the Queen in her dance moves away the head, alluring and refusing."⁷¹ The Second Attendant is shocked to see the Queen laughing and loving the dead. This is followed by the Queen's dance of adoration to the taps of drum while raising the head up. As the drum taps approach the climactic point, the Queen presses her lips to the lips of the head and sinks slowly down holding the head to her breast. Then the two Attendants close the inner curtain telling us that the Queen and the Swineherd have descended for desecration and the lover's night. The play comes to an end with a choric dialogue between these two Attendants. Katharine Worth has remarked that the play "ends in a long drawn out shivering to the orgiastic rhythm of accelerating drum beats; a sexual climax that is also as in Wilde's Salome, a summit of some other sort, a reconciliation between the virgin impulse towards the cold perfection of the Moon and the voice out of the ignorant forest that spoke of dung and Swine."⁷²

The play refers to the Orphic tradition and to Yeats's working of his own imagination. This is clear from the fact that the Swineherd sings only when his head is cut

71. Ibid., p.629.

72. Katharine Worth, The Irish Drama of Europe, p.118.

off. This beheading allows some emotional and unreasoning inspirations to work. Similarly Yeats's muse represented by the Queen wants the poetry of passions and not of ideas. So this fully conforms to Yeats's own preference for the passionate art. The play adhering to his early ideals is rooted in Ireland, since it is the depiction of the myth of 'Aodh and Dectira.' In this myth Aodh, a Stroller minstrel, comes to the Queen while she is binding up her hair. He is about to sing for her, when the Queen's enemies come and invade her property. In the ensuing battle the Stroller is killed. Now, Dectira, the Queen goes out in his search, but she finds just a head hanging from a bush, singing a lyric: "he gives his beloved certain rhymes."⁷³ The carefully selected details of this story incorporated in the play under reference are clearly marked.

Like his other later play, A Full Moon in March, too, is metaphysical and illustrates Yeats's philosophy of A Vision. Its very title is related to phase fifteen of A Vision, which is a phase of complete beauty according to Yeats's system. At this phase unity of being is achieved. March is a point when one cycle ends giving birth to another one. This phase suggests bodily perfection as well, symbolized by the Moon.⁷⁴ F.A.C. Wilson has emphasized

73. See W.B.Yeats's early story 'The Binding of the Hair,' published in the 1897 edition of his The Secret Rose, quoted A.N.Jafferes and A.S.Knowland, eds., A Commentary on the Collected Plays of W.B.Yeats, p.250.

74. See W.B. Yeats, A Vision, pp. 135-6.

this philosophical aspect of the play thus :

The Queen represents perfect beauty symbolised by the moon, unmixed spirituality as distinct from energy whose symbol is the sun. But she in her-cold passivity has been as imperfect as the Swineherd (human soul) in his brutal oblivion of her divine origin; heaven is no heaven until it has been fertilized by its opposite, the energy which is the property of time.⁷⁵

The play thus seems to correspond to Yeats's concept of the unity of opposites based on Plato's theory of opposites.

The play has an aesthetic dimension as well. From the aesthetic point of view the play suggests the union of the cursed poet with the images, which costs him his life, but leaves him his song. In psychological terms the play illustrates Crazy Jane's saying that "love has pitched its tent in the place of excrement, that is, higher love is rooted in gross physical union."⁷⁶ The play also illustrates Yeats's grappling with the mysteries of life during this period that forms the main subject-matter of his later plays. The play, like The Ressurrection, also conforms to Yeats's concept of life after death as is evident from its song. This song highlights the dramatization of an ancient ritual and Yeats's own belief in the union of matter and spirit. This type of eternal unity is in full conformity with Yeats's own endeavour to attain the unity of being in the Queen's dance.

75. F.A.C. Wilson, W.B. Yeats and Tradition (London : Gollancz, 1958), pp. 91-2.

76. See K.S. Misra, Twentieth Century English Poetic Drama: A Revaluation, pp. 43-4.

The play also shows the influence of Wilde's Salome on Yeats, which he himself has confessed:

When I think of the moment before revelation I think of Salome... dancing before Herod and receiving the prophet's head in her indifferent hands, and wonder if what seems to us decadence was not in reality, the exaltation of the muscular flesh and of civilization perfectly achieved.⁷⁷

Its final song "Their desecration and the lover's night" reminds of the following lines of his poem Crazy Jane Talks with a Bishop.

A woman can be proud and stiff
When on love intent;
But love not pitched his mansion in
The place of excrement:
For nothing can be sole or whole
That has not been rent.⁷⁸

Technically, the play fully corresponds with Yeats's decision to follow Noh-pattern for all his remaining plays. The play has Attendants representing the Musicians of the dance-plays besides including drum, gong, and mask -- all the main ingredients of Noh-technique. Like them, the play ends with the dance of Salome, which to quote Peter Ure 'is the most absolute of Yeats's dancers.'⁷⁹

77. W.B. Yeats, A Vision (B), p. 273.

78. W.B. Yeats, Collected Poems, p. 294.

79. Peter Ure, Yeats, p.100.

But this play slightly deviates from the Noh-Plays in the sense that it is not abstract like them. The play exploits ample human emotions in the two lover's desire to unite eternally. Besides, the play has a strong story element, as in almost all his final plays. The play demonstrates Yeats's device of dramatic contrast. Its first part appears as a dialogue in the dramatic blank-verse, and the second seems to be a powerful blending of erotic dance and two best lyrics that Yeats wrote.

Here Yeats has exploited such devices as the deus-ex-machina, in the scene when emblematic figures descend on the stage in its final song. The play also exhibits Yeats's long fascination with curtains which here provide a means by which deeply recessive effects can be created. According to this the stage curtain is drawn back to reveal such characters as are distanced from us with the aid of a mask. It is the Attendants who open and close the inner curtains. This suggests some inner mystery. Here the presentation of the severed heads on the stage is necessary for the performance of the sexual dance by the Queen, without bringing into the play any bathetic element. So here is a difficulty of stage performance, since here there is no king to collect it off the stage. But with the device of curtains Yeats solves this problem skilfully just by placing the Attendants close to the inner curtains twice,

the second time when the Queen orders Swineherd's beheading and drops her veil. Her back is to the audience so that they do not see her face. Even when the curtains are again drawn she is in the same posture with dropped veil. But now she is shown holding a severed head above her own head. This implies that the dance of the Queen is taking place at some remote 'dark portion of mind' behind the veil. So, the curtains keep and maintain the obscurity of erotic mystery. These curtains thus are related to hidden things and suggest a sense of mysteriousness. Here the use of this device of curtain shows his consistent experimentation to evolve something new. The play seems to be a theatrically exciting variation of his dance play form. To quote Masaru Sakine this device of curtains "is also an image of intense theatricality"⁸⁰ Its lyric corresponding to the poetry he at this time desired, embodies the whole play instead of trying to know or explain the truth of the myth. It demonstrates his belief that "the element of strength in poetic language is common passion."⁸¹

The play, positively, seems to exhibit an improvement in Yeats's dramatic craft. Here, the blending of both the Noh and the Elizabethan conventions, as suited his dramatic aims, shows Yeats's mastery of technique born out of his never-ceasing experiments. By this fusion of

80. Masaru Sakine, Irish Writers and the Theatre, p.226.

81. W.B. Yeats, Plays and Controversies, p. 47.

different and varied elements Yeats seems quite near to attain his ideal unity of impressions.

V

The King of the Great Clock Tower

The King of the Great Clock Tower (1934) was originally written in prose, and afterwards changed into verse. During this time Yeats was preoccupied with the myth of a slain God, which impressed him so deeply that he made the present play out of this myth. Already in The Ressurrection, Yeats has used this myth. In this context he wrote: "My two plays (the prose version of The King of the Great Clock Tower and The Ressurrection) both deal with the Slain God, the Risen God."⁸² Yeats further explains how, finding it unpopular in prose, he converted it into verse, "A friend I had asked to read The Ressurrection -- sought me out at the fall of the curtain full of enthusiasm, but said 'when I tried to read it I was so bored that I could not get beyond the second page'. I came to the conclusion that prose dialogue is as unpopular among my studious friends as dialogue in verse among actors and players. I have, therefore, written The King of the Great Clock Tower in verse."⁸³

82. W.B. Yeats, Letters, pp. 826-7.

83. See 'A Preface' to A Full Moon in March, 1935. Quoted in A.N.Jafferes and A.S.Knowland, eds., A Commentary on the Collected Plays of W.B.Yeats, pp. 253-4.

This play, like the other plays of this phase, illustrates Yeats's philosophy of rebirth, but in the guise of the myth of a Slain God. Yeats, in his commentary on this play, wrote that:

In the first edition of The Secret Rose there is a story based on some old Gaelic legend. A certain man swears to sing the praise of a certain woman, his head is cut off and the head sings. A poem of mine, called 'He gives his beloved certain Rhymes' was the song of the head.⁸⁴

It is this story that has been dramatized here in the Noh pattern. The play conforms to Yeats's aim to deal with Ireland's own myths and legends in order to create an Irish Theatre. The play has three characters : King, Queen and a Stroller poet. The King is shown as ruling the Great Clock Tower. In this land comes a Stroller poet singing a song in praise of the Queen's beauty. This poet wants that the Queen should dance with him, while he is singing. His wish is highly annoying to the King. The King orders the beheading of this Stroller poet, which is soon carried out. However, the head of this poet is brought into a platter. Now the Queen too, as the poet had wished, begins to dance carrying his severed head on her shoulders.

84. See Yeats's commentary on 'The Great Clock Tower,' in the 1934 edition of the plays, quoted in A.N.Jafferes and A.S.Knowland, eds., A Commentary on the Collected Plays of W.B. Yeats, p. 254.

The play begins with the appearance of two Attendants on the stage, both standing by the drum and the gong. They slowly part the curtain and sing the following song:

Every lover is a happy rogue;
 And should he speak, it is the speech of birds.
 No thought has he because no clock,
 Never touching upon that happy ground
 There the hound that Oisin saw pursues
 The hornless deer that runs in such a fright;
 And there the woman claps an apple tight
 For all the clamour of a faminished man.⁸⁵

As the song ends, we see on the stage the King and the Queen sitting on two thrones. The King addresses the Queen and says that when he brought her a year ago in his house and seated her on the throne he asked nothing about her parental background. But now when the whole court is assembled he wants to know about her name, family and country. But the Queen is sitting dumb as an image made of wood or metal, "A screen between the living and the dead."⁸⁶ Then the King hears a knock at the door. He permits the man, knocking at the door to come in. Soon we see that a traveller enters the house and tells them that he is called Stroller. He also says that he is a poet and has written songs in praise of the Queen's beauty without having seen her. The King gets

85. W.B. Yeats, Collected Plays, p. 633.

86. Ibid., p. 634.

annoyed and asks him if he has no wife or mistress whose beauty he can praise in his songs. The Stroller says:

I had a wife. The image in my head made her
 Appear fat, slow, thick of the limbs,
 I left her, but a night or two ago
 I ate my sausages at a tavern table
 I dine among the ganders and a gander scoffed,
 Said I would drink myself to sleep, or cry
 My head among the dishes on the table,
 Because of a woman I had never seen.⁸⁷

Thus the Stroller asks the King to', "send for the Queen.
 The ganders cannot scoff when I have seen her."⁸⁸ to the
 Queen at his side the Stroller cries out:

The Queen of the Great Clock Tower is at my side.
 Neither so red, nor white, nor full in the breast
 As I had thought. What matter for all that
 So long as I proclaim her everywhere most beautiful.⁸⁹

Now the King asks him to go as he has seen the Queen but the
 Stroller says that he would go only when the Queen dances
 with him alone. The King is shocked and he grants him
 permission to sing out but not from gratitude. Then the
 King orders the guard to flog the Stroller out. The Stroller
 calls himself a sacred man and says:

The great Aengus spoke --
 'On stroke of midnight when the old year dies,
 Upon the stroke, the tolling of that bell,
 The Queen shall kiss your mouth.'⁹⁰

87. Ibid., p.635.

88. Ibid.

89. Ibid., p.636.

The King finds the Stroller's words insulting both to the Queen and himself. He orders that the head of the Stroller be cut off and brought to the King. The Stroller is ready to let his head be cut off, but he is sure that all that he just told would come true: "First the Queen will dance before me, second I shall sing."⁹¹ The King first is shocked to hear that even after his head is severed the Stroller would continue singing. Then he says:

Stand where you are!
 All from the beginning has been lies.
 Perhaps if you will speak, and speak the truth,
 I may not kill him. What? you will not speak?
 Then take him, Captain of the guard.
 And bring his head as evidence of his death.⁹²

The King asks the Queen to do something and not just stare at him. Then the Attendants sing in the Queen's voice. Its meaning is not understood by the King. "The King goes to the right and returns with the head of the Stroller, and lays it upon the cubical throne to the right nearest audience."⁹³ Now the King mockingly asks the Stroller to sing. In the meantime we see that the Queen begins to dance and takes up the severed head upon her shoulders. As the King watches all this "his eyelids begin to move and tremble."⁹⁴ Then the King tells us that the two Attendants

91. Ibid.

92. Ibid., p.638.

93. Ibid.

94. Ibid., p. 639.

have also started singing like the severed head. The Queen continues her dance even after the song has ended. Finally she presses her lips to the lips of the severed head, and lays it on her breast. In the meantime the King takes out his sword. As he is about to strike he kneels down laying the sword at her feet. Now the two Attendants close the inner curtain and talk about the dance of lovely ladies. After this, as the Queen comes down the stage the outer curtain descends. The play comes to an end with the 'alternative song' for the severed head by the Musicians:

Saddle and ride, I heard a man say,
Out of the Ben Bulben and Knocknarea,
What says the clock in the great clock tower?⁹⁵

Critics have interpreted the play in diverse ways. According to Nathan, the play suggests "the completion of being; the Queen, a supernatural figure, needs to complete her being by uniting with her opposite, the Stroller."⁹⁶ For F.A.C. Wilson the play is a "reconstruction of the Platonic myth of the relation between matter and spirit in which the Stroller symbolises spirit in its fallen condition, after the descent into matter, but spirit which is nevertheless in love with the idea of heaven (symbolised by the Queen)."⁹⁷ Kermode on the other hand takes it in

95. Ibid., p. 641.

96. L.Nathan, The Tragic Drama of W.B. Yeats, p. 194.

97. F.A.C. Wilson, W.B. Yeats and Tradition, pp. 70-2.

aesthetic terms with the Stroller as artist, the poet Maudit, and the Queen as image, out of time, deathless, and having nothing to do with intellect."⁹⁸ But Vendler writes, "It is clear from the description of phase 14 in A Vision... that the Queen in The King of the Great Clock Tower and in A Full Moon in March belongs to that phase of aloof beauty."⁹⁹ So all the critics have interpreted the play in philosophic terms.

The play apparently seems to be a dramatization of a mere legendary tale of two lovers, but at the deeper level the play suggests Yeats's philosophy of life and death that preoccupied him all through his life, mainly during the last phase of his life. In all his last plays we find him thinking of the mysteries of life and death. In this context Ellmann Richard comments that : "still the question regarding the relation between life and death haunts him. Yeats thought seriously about death and drew the conclusion that life was related to death or to destiny...like his two gyres."¹⁰⁰

The play undoubtedly provides philosophical and mythical experiences. According to Wilson these five last plays contain Yeats's whole philosophy of life, He says that these plays "are an achievement of utmost subtlety, they cover between them, the whole field of human experience and

98. F.Kermode, Romantic Image, p. 81.

99. H. Vendler, Yeats's Vision and the Later Plays, Ellmann.

100. See Ellman Richard, W.B.Yeats: The Man and the Mask, p.274.

convey some of Yeats's acutest criticism of life."¹⁰¹ This conforms to Yeats's following statement: "I will begin to write my most fundamental thoughts and arrangements of thought which, I am convinced, will complete my studies. It seems to me I have found what I wanted when I try to put all into a phrase. I say 'man can embody truth but can't know it. I must embody it in the contemplation of my life.'"¹⁰²

Here Yeats's philosophy of re-creation is also noticeable in the legend of Dionysius. The play, hence, depicts the cyclical movement of human life and is in keeping with the following passage of A Vision :

The four ages of Individual man ... are also the four ages of civilization... First age, earth, vegetative function, second age, water, blood, sex. Third age, air, breath, intellect. Fourth age, fire, soul etc. In the first two the man comes to the full resurrection of Christ and Dionysius. Man becomes rational, no longer driven from below or above.¹⁰³

This is evident in the lines :

There every lover is happy rogue;

 Nerve touching Nerve upon that happy ground
 Are bobbins where all time is bound and wound.¹⁰⁴

101. F.A.C. Wilson, W.B. Yeats and Tradition, p. 46.

102. See Ellmann Richard, W.B. Yeats The Man and the Mask, p.285.

103. W.B. Yeats, A Vision (B), pp. 210-11.

104. W.B. Yeats, Collected Plays, p.633.

The play belongs, as it appears from the final dance and the above quoted lines, to the thirteenth cycle described in A Vision,:

It is that cycle which may deliver us from the twelve cycles of time and space. It is the phaseless sphere, called the Thirteenth sphere, for every lesser cycle contains within itself a sphere that is, as it were, messenger of the final deliverance our expanding cone seems to cut through its gyre; spiritual influx is from its circumference, animate life from its centre.¹⁰⁵

Here, the Queen too in her final dance seems to get rid of the cycles of time and space, and attains the timeless unity with the Stroller poet.

The play also demonstrates the influence of the Indian Philosopher, Mohini Chatterji, on Yeats during this time. This is seen in the supernatural songs of the play as 'The Ribh of the Tomb of Bail' etc.¹⁰⁶ A passages in Yeats's commentary on supernatural songs certifies that his knowledge of Indian hermit led him to create the hermit ribh. This Ribh is nothing else but Yeats's mask that suggests affinities between the Irish, early Christian, Indian and orthodox Christian thoughts -- all at the same

105. W.B. Yeats, A Vision, (B), pp. 210-11.

106. See H.R. Bachan, The Occultism of W.B. Yeats (Delhi: Motilal Banarasidas, 1965), p. 160.

time. This is related to his search for the unity of culture. Besides, the play also shows his belief in supernaturalism and divinity that originated during the early phase of celtic twilight. This is clear from Yeats's remark that "The King and the Queen and Zeus and Cyple are the masculine and feminine elements in the divine make up."¹⁰⁷ This play also demonstrates the influence of Wilde's Salome on Yeats, noticeable most of all in its dance of severed head.

As regards its technique, the play fully conforms to the Noh-pattern employed in the dance plays. It has mask, music, chorus, climactic dance, etc. The play conforms to Yeats's following assertion: "Any new play, I might write could be founded upon Japanese model and designed for the cogniscent or for readers prepared to study them with care : he would pacify uninitiated by means of surface narrative, but his syblism would remain as in the past."¹⁰⁸ In fact with this play Yeats's search for a drmatic model comes to an end. Yeats says : "In this form I can be as subtle or metaphysical as I like, without endangering the clarity necessary for dramatic effect."¹⁰⁹

107. W.B. Yeats, Autobiographies, p. 142.

108. W.B. Yeats, King of the Great Clock Tower (Dublin : Caula Press, 1934), p.19.

109. Ibid.

This play, in its use of orange, red and black colour that suggest violent eroticism, conforms to Yeats's belief that decor and costume should be suggestive of the mood of the play, and that everything seen by the audience, costumes or curtains, should contribute to the meaning of the play. Here with the aid of the folding and unfolding of decorative curtains, both at the beginning and end of the play, Yeats sought to create a timeless world below the level of daylight consciousness in which the audience were supposed to wander. Like Maeterlink, Yeats also believed that both the form and the colour were to work subliminally following the method of the European painters, who conveyed such hidden meaning that could not be put into words.

In its diction, as in its theme, Yeats has brought some changes. Now the speaking of verse no longer attracted him, instead he aimed at the speech that was to be hard, bare and natural like a Saga. He even gave up his struggle to get poetry spoken to music. He said while producing this

The plain fable, the plain prose of the dialogue, Ninette-de-Valois' dance are there for the audience. They can find my words in the books if they are curious.... I can be as subtle and metaphysical as I like without endangering the clarity necessary for the dramatic effect.¹¹⁰

110. See W.B. Yeats, Commentary on 'The Great Clock Tower' in A.N. Jafferres and A.S. Knowland, eds., A Commentary on the Collected Plays of W.B. Yeats, p. 254.

VI

The Herne's Egg

The Herne's Egg (1938) is a variation on Yeats's recurrent dramatic theme of the survival of soul after death, explicated in A Vision. The play, like Yeats's other last plays, deals with the problems of life, death and life after death. Here it interweaves the Indian philosophy of the Upanishads too, which had fascinated Yeats. He has confessed his borrowings from the Indian source and written: "I work in my bed till noon at the verse play ... Shri Purohit Swami is with me, and the play is his philosophy in a fable, or mine confirmed by him."¹¹¹ The play has a simple fable with a philosophical depth in it like the other last plays of Yeats. The play also contains the strands of Irish myths and legends.

The play depicts the story of the enmity between the two kings, namely Congal - King of Connacht and Aedh - King of Tara. It begins with the conversation between Aedh, King of Tara and Congal King of Cannoucht. From conversation we learn that they have fought fifteen battles till now. But now after this fifteenth battle they have decided to sign a treaty of peace. So Congal on this auspicious occasion has organized a dinner in the principal house of Aedh "In his principal

111. W.B. Yeats, Letters, p. 843.

city, Tara. And have set their minds upon a certain novelty or relish."¹¹² In this dinner Congal wants to serve a herne's egg. Attracta, a priestess, comes on the stage to tell Congal that according to the custom only the woman of these rocks who is married to the Great Herne can eat, handle or look upon the herne's egg. Congal calls Attracta a mad woman for "she thinks that she is promised or married to a bird."¹¹³ But for Attracta the Great Herne is the only reality whom she claims to be married to. Here Corney comes and declares the Great Herne's curse that whosoever steals a herne's egg would be changed into a fool and "to the end his fool breath at a fool's hand meet his death."¹¹⁴ But Congal says that the curse that "I shall live and die a fool, and die upon some battlefield at some fool's hand,"¹¹⁵ is already known to him. There is no need to damn him with a new curse. After this when all, except Attracta and three girls, exit, a sound of a flute playing 'The Great Herne's feather' is heard. These three girls give a commentary that now Attracta being called by her God takes a white egg out of a basket and starts moving according to the note of the flute. She looks, they tell us, like "a doll upon a wire,"¹¹⁶ as her human life has vanished from her. Then they

112. Ibid., p. 648.

113. Ibid., p. 649.

114. Ibid., p. 651.

115. Ibid., p. 654.

116. Ibid.

tell us that she has gone travelling in long leaps like a dancer and like a hare to couple in the blazing heat of the sun to lie there in his bed full of his might. At this moment Congal all alone, enters the scene and reaches the dinning table, where he finds that a common hen's egg has been put before him while others have a herne's egg. This he finds insulting and thinks that it is a deliberate conspiracy of Aedh to humiliate him. Congal thus challenges Aedh to fight and finally kills him in this fight. Now Attracta still in a trance comes with a herne's egg in her hand. At this one of Congal's seven men says :

She found that herne's egg on the table
And left the hen's egg there instead
By changing one egg for another.
She has brought bloodshed on us all.¹¹⁷

Congal says that is the Great Herne that makes Attracta do all this. The Great Herne being a God and out of reach cannot be harmed but Congal suggests a device for this. He says:

We seven in the name of the law
Must handle, penetrate, and possess her.¹¹⁸

Initially all his men feel hesitant to do so but as Congal declares it as his order, all agree to it. In the meanwhile

117. Ibid., p. 661.

119. Ibid., p. 662.

Attracta unaware of all such things goes in a trance and sings a song of her joyful union with the Great Herne, her husband. As her trance is over Congal says that "The seven held you in their arms last night. Seven men lay with you in the night."¹¹⁹ Attracta defends and asserts her chastity:

The Herne is my husband. I lay beside him, his pure bride.¹²⁰

She pleads with the Great Herne to help her and to let the round heaven declare that she is chaste. Soon a thunder is heard and all men scared by it declare, "Great Herne, she is pure."¹²¹ All men one by one take back their words and prostrate themselves except Attacta and Congal. The Great Herne being annoyed curses these seven men with being born as animals after their death. But Congal's fate is still undecided. But already he is cursed to die at a fool's hand upon the holy mountain, upon 'Slieve Fuadh' when the moon is full.

After this we are taken to a "mountain top where the moon has just risen; The Fool, a man in a ragged clothes carrying a large stone."¹²² Congal also comes and talks to the Fool. Here the Fool tells him that after to-night he would get a great glory by killing a man because when he sat in widow Rooney's kitchen somebody told him :

120. Ibid.

121. Ibid., p. 168.

122. Ibid., p. 671.

King Congal's on the mountain
 Cursed to die at the hands of Fool. Kill him
 And said I should kill him at the full moon.¹²³

The Fool arms himself with his spit, couldron lid and pot.
 Here Congal reveals his identity. Soon Attracta comes here
 with Corney. Congal now requests her to save him :

I am afraid of what the Herne
 May do with me when I am dead.
 I am afraid that he may put me
 Into the shape of a brute beast.¹²⁴

Soon he dies. Attracta now invites Corney to lie with her
 before Congal's body cools down in order to save him from
 being born as a brute beast. But just then Corney hears a
 donkey's braying and Attracta realises that now it is too
 late:

He couples with another donkey.
 That donkey has conceived. I thought that I
 Could give a human form to Congal
 But now he must be born a donkey.¹²⁵

Corney too says :

All that trouble and nothing to show for it
 Nothing but just another donkey.¹²⁶

123. Ibid.

124. Ibid., p. 676-7.

125. Ibid., p. 678.

126. Ibid.

The play thus is akin to the other last plays which present a war between two parties either for their identity or love. It depicts a war between divinity and humanity each trying to attain authority. Here Yeats seems to realise the limitations of human life. This conforms to his concept of cyclical movement of life, as he once wrote: "I saw in the changes of Moon all the cycles, the soul realising its separate being in the full Moon, then as the Moon comes to approach the Sun and dwindle, but realising its absorption of God."¹²⁷ This we see in Congal's death that completes the process as he dies into his opposite, and asserting his own will, becomes a fool but objectively he is absorbed into the will of the Great Herne. To quote Moore "the play suggests that the self-reliance of hero is illusory"¹²⁸ The creation of life presented in this play through egg, also accords with the concept of the Upanishads.¹²⁹ Yeats's depiction of the Great Herne as a symbol of spirit conforms to the interpretation of God, self or truth in Upanishads. In its dramatization of the limitations and destiny of human life this play also seems to conform to the thirteenth cone of Yeats's system contained in the following lines of Corney :

127. W.B. Yeats, Wheels and Butterflies, p. 139.

128. J.R. Moore, Masks of Love and Death, p. 297.

129. See Purohit Swami and W.B. Yeats eds., The Ten Principal Upanishads (London: Faber and Faber, 1952) pp. 79-80.

I have heard that a donkey carries its young longer than other beasts.

Thirteen months it must carry it.¹³⁰

This seems to imply that Congal can't be delivered till he reaches the thirteenth cycle - thirteenth month."¹³¹ Here Yeats seems to see India and Ireland as complimentary. So the play in this excellent blending also conforms to Yeats's search for the cultural unity. The play also conforms to the other post-Noh plays in its metaphysical and symbolic presentation.

However, in regard to its technique, it stands out all alone as it deviates from the Noh-pattern. Indeed, the play has an effective dramatic technique with a powerful story to sustain it. Its dialogue has none of the abstraction that is the crux of his dance plays. The play also has an effect of immediacy. Here Yeats also seems to rely heavily upon a painted stage since this play faced a problem regarding its presentation.

Though here characters, like the Noh-characters, are symbolic, they are more rounded, and endowed with flesh and blood. Yeats here seems to have realised his mistake that solidity of characterisation can be sacrificed only at a big price of dramatic effectiveness. Here he seems to conclude

130. See W.B. Yeats, Collected Plays, p. 678.

131. See W.B. Yeats, A Vision (B), pp. 299-10.

that a play to be effective, successful and powerful on the stage should have a strong story element and powerful, substantial characters apart from other elements. The play seems to follow the traditions of a farce. Yeats had already exploited it in his The Green Helmet and The Player Queen. In fact Yeats wanted to make it as wild a play as his The Player Queen.¹³²

VII

Purgatory

Purgatory (1938), is based on the Swedenborgian account of the remoulding of soul after death, which occupies a significant part of Yeats's A Vision. The play dramatises Yeats's statement that "... at need angelic spirits who act upon us there as here, widening and deepening the consciousness of will, can draw forth all the past, and we live again all our transgressions and see our victims as if they were present, together with the places, words and motives; and that suddenly when a scene bursts upon the 'sight' life awakens again and again."¹³³

The present play, like The Dreaming of the Bones, deals with the process of dreaming-back. In this context

132. W.B. Yeats, Letters, p. 843.

133. W.B. Yeats, Essays, p. 35.

Yeats remarks:

My plot is my meaning. I think the dead suffer the remorse and recreate their old lives just as I have described. There are medieval Japanese plays about it, and much in the folklore of all countries. In my play, a spirit suffers because of its share, when alive in the destruction of an honoured house, that destruction is taking place all over Ireland today. Sometimes it is the result of poverty, but more often because a new Individualistic Generation has lost interest in the ancient sanctities... In some few cases a house has been destroyed by a mesalliance. I have founded my play on this exceptional case, partly because of my interest in certain problems of eugenics. The problem is not Irish, but European, though it is perhaps more acute here than elsewhere.¹³⁴

Hence, as the above passage shows, the play illustrates both Yeats's personal belief as well as that of entire Europe. Here again he seems to go back to his concept of cultural unity, and the ideal of dealing with Irish myths, and legends. Here the reference is to the big house culture's surrender to the drunken democracy. Here we also have something similar to the phantasmagoria, where the perceptible, visible world is created by the perception of God. The play narrates the tale of a young girl of a rich

134. See Donald T. Torchiana, Yeats and Georgian Ireland (Evanston: North Western University Press, 1966), pp.357-8.

family who gets married into the stable of drunkards. This lady however dies during her delivery. The narrator, now an Old Man, is this unfortunate child, who having been abandoned by his drunkard father became like his father a drunkard. Later on being disgusted by his drunkard father's rude behaviour the Old Man stabbed his father with his knife at the age of sixteen. This is the Old Man's past story which he at present narrates to his own Son at his old house. The occasion on which he has come here is the wedding anniversary of his parents. Here the Old Man, now a pedlar, is watching his mother purgatorially re-living the past events of her wedding night and the act of lust in which he was conceived. While he is busy in this, his Son tries to rob the Old Man and steals his money, and even scuffles with his father. But the Old Man stabs him so that the pollution does not pass on to the future generations and the past evil is put an end to. But immediately the Old Man realises the futility of his act of killing his Son because his mother will continue suffering penance and none can save her except God. The play's most immediate source seems to be a story of ghosts narrated by Yeats at one of Charles Reckett's Friday evenings.¹³⁵

135. J.M. Hone, W.B. Yeats: 1865 - 1939 (London: Macmillan, 1942), pp.283-4.

The play opens in a ruined house in front of which stand a wandering Pedlar (an old man) and his Son. They seem to correspond to the travellers in the Noh-Plays, who rest at a shrine or some haunted place. The play begins with a conversation between these two - the Old Man and his Son, who are the only dramatic personae in the play. The Old Man shows his son an old house, which he visited earlier also and tries to recall his past history:

I try to remember what the butler said to a drunken
 In mid-October But I can not.¹³⁶ gamekeeper

Then the Old Man tells his Son that fifty years ago he used to live in this house which is now inhabited by the souls in Purgatory, that come back to familiar spots and:

Re-live their transgressions, and not once
 But many times; they know at last
 The consequences of those transgressions;
 Whether upon others or upon themselves;
 If upon themselves,
 There is no help but in themselves
 And in the mercy of God.¹³⁷

Here the Old Man clearly points out the concept of the dreaming back of the dead, which is the central concern of the play. In his next speech he recalls the life of his parents:

136. W.B. Yeats, Collected Plays, p.681.

137. Ibid., p.682.

My father, a groom in a training stable,
 Looked at him and married him
 And he squandered everything she had.
 She died in giving birth to me,
 But he killed the house; to kill a house
 Where great men grew, married, died,
 I declare a capital offence.¹³⁸

Then the Old Man tells his Son about his own miserable childhood. He tells him that his father never sent him to any school and he was taught by a gamekeeper's wife. The Old Man says that his father after some time burnt all his books and the house while he was drunk. At this the Old Man, when he was sixteen years of age, stabbed his drunkard father with a knife. Consequently the drunkard friends of his drunkard father threatened to put the Old Man upon trial. But the Old Man ran away from one place to another till at last he became a pedlar on the road. Here his tale ends and now he tells his Son that the occasion on which he has come in this house is the wedding anniversary of his dead parents. He now sees his mother's shade re-living her past. The recurring dream is that of the married life and the act of lust in which he was conceived: "A window is lit showing a young girl."¹³⁹ The Old Man sees his mother standing on this window and purgatorially renewing her

138. Ibid., p.683.

139. Ibid., p.685.

pleasure in her own degeneration. The Old Man says:

But there is a problem! she must live
Through everything in exact detail,
Driven to it by remorse, and yet
Can she renew the sexual act.¹⁴⁰

Here we see his mother's ghost locked into the dream of ruin and destruction just like the two lovers of The Dreaming of the Bones, who were locked in the dream of frustration for having let the Norman's in. In the meanwhile as the Old Man is busy watching his mother re-living her tragic experiences, his Son grown in the image of his drunkard grandfather whom the Old Man calls "A bastard that a pedlar got upon a tinker's daughter in a ditch,"¹⁴¹ steals the Old Man's money. As the Old Man sees this, he struggles over to reclaim the money and his anger becomes uncontrollable. So to put an end to this chain of consequences of evil the Old Man stabs his Son with the same knife with which he stabbed his father. He now thinks of releasing his mother's soul from its self-imposed purgatory. He does it in order to stop the pollution from passing on to the future generation so that history does not repeat itself. So this act is a sort of a sacrifice on his part. But soon he realises that such an

140. Ibid., p.686.

141. Ibid., p.684.

act can not release the soul from its remorseful dreaming-back. The situation is ironical in the sense that the crime or the evil which the Old Man wants to curb for ever by killing his Son further ressurects it. Though at first he says:

Dear Mother, the widow is dark again,
But you are in the light because
I finished all that consequence.¹⁴²

Later on he, realising that only God can save her, cries out in utter despair :

Twice a murderer and all for nothing,
And she must animate that dead night
Not once but many times! O'God,
Release my mother's soul from its dream!
Man can do no more. Appease
The misery of the living and the remorse of the dead.¹⁴³

The play ends with the conclusion drawn by the Old Man that only God's mercy can work here and that history does repeat itself. Here we see that the Old Man, like Yeats's other heroes, is eventually defeated. The Old Man reminds us of Eliot's Harry in his play The Family Reunion, who finally seeks God to escape from his vicious cycle of consequences. This further coresponds to Yeatsian heroes getting "in their

142. Ibid., p. 688.

143. Ibid., p. 689.

blind struggle in the network of the stars."¹⁴⁴ Its plot too seems to rely upon this blind struggle of its protagonist, which in the words of Peter Ure "is a sharp contrast with that impersonality, that withdrawal of character, those faces of bronze and marble, the individual lost amidst the labyrinth of its lines of which Yeats had written so much."¹⁴⁵

The play seems to hint at the Oedipus Complex, as the rivalry of male appears central in an attempt to kill sexual rivals, first his father then the Son. The play, in its process of dreaming-back, brings to our mind the Roman Catholic doctrine of life after death, according to which if a man had not been very sinful, then, after death, his soul is kept in purgatory for purification, where the past sinful acts are expiated. This expiation leads the soul to heaven. This concept conforms to Yeats's system explained in A Vision. Here Yeats writes :

All the involuntary acts and facts of life are the effect of whirring and interlocking of the gyres -- we all to some extent meet again and again the same people and certainly in some cases form a kind of family of two or three or more persons who come together life after life till all passionate relations are exhausted, --

144. See. Dennis Donoghue, ed., W.B. Yeats's Memoirs, p.328.

145. Peter Ure, Yeats, p.104.

sometimes, however, a single relationship will repeat itself, turning its revolving wheel again and again, -- All such passions, they say, contain 'cruelty and deciet' (this) must be expiated in primary suffering and submission, or the old tragedy will be repeated.¹⁴⁶

The play, dramatizes man's struggle to free himself from this cycle of cause and effect. Yeats says : "spirit is not the changing images but light and draws back into itself all it has felt and known"¹⁴⁷ This particular experience of suffering the remorse in the process of purification corresponds to what Yeats has explained in A Vision.¹⁴⁸

The theme conforms to his search for unity of culture. Yeats himself wrote that : "I am convinced that this ancient generalisation was once a universal belief, for I find it, or some practice founded upon it, everywhere. Certainly I find it in old Irish literature, in modern Irish folklore, in Japanses plays, in Swedenborg, in the phenomenon of spiritualism, accompanied by the belief that living can assist the imagination of the dead."¹⁴⁹

Besides, the play also conforms to Yeats's belief in mystical experiences that he derived from the Cabbalists. It

146. W.B. Yeats, A Vision, p. 237-9.

147. Ibid., p. 219-40.

148. Ibid., p. 223-5.

149. Ibid., p. 221.

is clear from his reference to "those apparitions of murderer still dragging his victim, of the miser still collecting his money -- of the suicide still hanging from his rafter --. It was the opinion of the Cabbalist friends that the action of life remained so pictured but that the intensity of light depended upon the intensity of passion that had gone to their creations."¹⁵⁰

This play also deals with the problem of genetics conforming to Yeats's remark in 'If I were four and twenty', where Yeats says that "a single wrong choice may destroy a family, dissipating its tradition or biological force."¹⁵¹ This is linked with Yeats's realisation of Ireland's degeneration, also evident in the Old Man's following words:

I killed that lad
Because had he grown up
He would have struck a woman's fancy,
Begot, and passed pollution on.¹⁵²

Yeats, when he wrote it, felt this kind of increasing degeneration. In this context, Torchiana recalls one of Yeats's statement made to Synge by an old man, which later Yeats remembered as follows :

150. W.B. Yeats, Essays, pp. 330-2.

151. Ibid., p. 274.

152. W.B. Yeats, Collected Plays, p. 688.

The young people are of no use I am not as good a man as my father and my son is growing up worse than I am.¹⁵³

This 'Old Man' represents 19th century Ireland under O'Connell. These lines recall Yeats's following statement : "unless there is a change in the public mind every rank above the lowest must degenerate, and, as inferior men push up into its gaps, degenerate more and more quickly."¹⁵⁴ This concept of dreaming-back also contains something of an experience of 'Timeless Individuality' in the context of which Yeats wrote : "archetypes of all possible existence whether of man or brute, and as it traverses its circle of allotted lives, now one, now another prevail. We may fail to express an archetype or alter it by reason, but all done from nature in its unfolding into time.... If we accept this idea many strange or beautiful things become credible ...All about us there seems to start up a precise inexplicable teeming life, and the earth becomes once more, not in rhetorical metaphor, but in reality, sacred."¹⁵⁵

In its technique, the play after Yeats's experiments in loose form, exhuberant, episodic and stage-manners of The Herne's Egg, has a tight structure of the Noh Plays. Here,

153. D. Torchiana, Yeats and Georgian Ireland, p. 362.

154. W.B. Yeats, Essays, p. 423.

155. W.B. Yeats, Wheels and Butterflies, pp. 37-8.

we have just one scene of intensity rendered with bitter, austere sense of tragedy, which stands in sharp contrast to the extravagance of The Green Helmet and The Player Queen. Its structure is precise, making it a reduced variation of the dance-plays. The play goes back to the Proscenium conventions. Here he has created a scenic image, the type of which we see in Beckett's theatre. As against the stage of the earlier plays where we see a contrast between the foreground and the distant vista ; here the stage remains an undefined place, with two main objects -- a ruined house and a bare tree. Like the dance plays it could be acted anywhere. But Yeats did not aim at it. He rather aimed that audience must see fatal objects themselves. Its stage is very simple but highly symbolic, in keeping with his lifelong ideal of an Elizabethan type of stage that works by suggestion and not by representation. Its setting with a ruined house and bare tree highlights its theme of lost culture and degeneracy. This play also uses certain theatrical effects, such as the use of light for the transfiguration. Here, by means of light he has created some of the most haunting images.

The Play conforms to the traditional one-act pattern in the monologue form and shows Yeats's masterly control over the one-act structure, where we find political & historical Ireland existing with Yeats's own thought, beliefs and concept. According to T.S.Eliot, this play shows "the

extraordinary theatrical skill with which [Yeats] has put so much action within the compass of a very short scene of but little movement."¹⁵⁶ He further calls the play as "a masterly exposition of the emotions of an Old Man."¹⁵⁷

Its verse conforming to that of Yeats's other later plays is free from the blank verse form of the earlier plays. It has range and freedom, at the same time retaining the vigorous preoccupation with solidity of statement. Even the songs here do not have the splendour and dignity of the song of the dance plays. It has been spoiled by the dramatic fabric to leave just necessary rhymes.

However, structurally it is regarded as Yeats's best play, standing out distinctly from his earlier plays. Here, he has quenched his thirst to present a unified image of different elements of dance, song, dialogue, music etc. Yeats, has said : "I have a one-act piece in my head, a scene of tragic intensity My recent work has greater strangeness and I think greater intensity than anything I have done. I never remember the dream so deep."¹⁵⁸ To quote Katharine Worth "Purgatory, is a virtuoso demonstration of flexibility and of continuity, a last fine fruit of experimental thinking going back over many years. The

156. See T.S.Eliot's,'Yeats' in D.E.S. Maxwell, Modern Irish Drama 1891-1980, p. 45.

157. Ibid.

158. W.B. Yeats, Letters, p.907.

structure is naturalistic, but, as many critics have observed, there is a No-like quality in the scene; the bare stage with its two focal points, which surely originated in Japanese prints that excited Yeats thirty years earlier, It is also, a development from the Craig's scene for The Hour Glass, which had a similar bareness."¹⁵⁹

VIII

The Death of Cuchulain

The Death of Cuchulain (1939) is Yeats's last dramatic work. This play puts an end to the Cuchulain myth dramatized in his five plays, which taken together form a kind of a cycle of the Cuchulain plays that begins with On Baile's Strand. This play, like the other plays of the cycle, exemplifies Yeats's philosophy of A Vision. The play portrays the famous Cuchulain, symbolising Irish heroic ideal. The play marks the point of crisis in the life of this single man. At the same time the play shows Yeats's attempts to present his views about death. This is evident from his letter to Ethel Manin where he wrote "I am writing a play on the death of Cuchulain, an episode or two from the

159. Katharine Worth, The Irish Drama of Europe, p. 64.

old epic. My private philosophy is there, but there must be no sign of it, all must be like an old fairy tale."¹⁶⁰

The plot of the play is indebted to various sources, such as Thurneyson's The Great Fall of Mag Muirthne and Curtin's Irish Folklores on Cuchulain. But Yeats seems to have based this play on some incidents from such episodes as 'The Gathering of Muirthemne' and 'Death of Cuchulain' in Lady Gregory's Cuchulain of Muirthemne, which is the main source of all his five Cuchulain plays. According to this legend once Cuchulain killed a monster in his youth. This monster had three daughters who were the Celtic Goddesses of war. These three daughters decided to take a revenge upon Cuchulain but could do nothing till Cuchulain became old. So Meave, one of the three daughters attacked his kingdom. Cuchulain was to die while opposing Meave. Hence, Emer, Cuchulain's wife, had hidden him in some far-away unknown valley, with Eithne Inguba to be his bed-fellow. Emer thought that Eithne Inguba's love might keep Cuchulain indoors. But somehow these three daughters traced this valley and thought of a device to bring Cuchulain out of it. According to this device they hired Eithne Inguba, his mistress, to change the message of Emer. Emer's message

160. W.B. Yeats, Letters, p. 462.

forbade Cuchulain to expose himself, but Eithne Inguba, on the other hand, informed Cuchulain that Emer's message was to no longer stay in sloth but to start fighting.

Cuchulain realising the deceit on Eithne Inguba's part came to know the true message of Emer. Unaffected by all this he ventured to go out and fight thinking that Eithne Inguba was perhaps tired of him and desired a younger lover. Consequently, he went into the battlefield and got injured. Afterwards he tied himself to a pillar, wishing to be killed. To this story Yeats adds the role of a Blind Man, who beheads Cuchulain.

The play begins with the prologue of an Old Man who introduces the play, and speaks directly for W.B. Yeats as his mouthpiece in the last phase of life. The Old Man's prologue is the last chain of those curtain speeches that Yeats started at the initial period of the Irish Dramatic Movement and followed till the end of his dramatic career. Yeats here recalls his early dramatic theories. In the Old Man's personality Yeats seems to recall his attempts to re-establish a ritualistic verse-drama, as opposed to the then popular melo-dramas and realistic plays. The play thus seems to sum up Yeats's life-long efforts to reinstall poetry to its pristine glory through his dramatic swan-song. The Old Man, the personae of Yeats himself, prefers a small educated

audience : "I wanted an audience of fifty or a hundred and if there are more, I beg them not to shuffle their feet or talk when the actors are speaking."¹⁶¹ These lines echo Yeats's following lines : "while writing these plays, intended for some fifty people in a drawing-room or studio, I have so rejoiced in my freedom from the stupidity of an ordinary audience."¹⁶²

The Old Man's endeavour to re-establish Homer's music with the help of a piper and singer shows Yeats's turn towards his early experiments on the psaltry with Florence Farr. Yeats's belief in the ritual drama and that music and dance, instead of music and lyric, have more successful fusion is made evident in the Old Man's words that : I promise a dance. I wanted a dance because where there are no words there is less to spoil."¹⁶³ Again Yeats's liking for symbolism is seen in the Old Man's wish to have non-naturalistic and symbolic dance.

The prologue, in fact, is a summary re-statement of Yeats's dramatic theory in its final shape. Here naturalism has uncompromisingly been abandoned forever. Symbolism has been given its due place. The continued function of music,

161. W.B. Yeats, Collected Plays, p. 693.

162. R.K. Alspach, eds., The Variorum Edition of the Plays of W.B. Yeats, p. 566.

163. W.B. Yeats, Collected Plays, p. 693.

dance and rhythm is asserted to be the primary concern of the poetic dramatist. The play opens with the appearance of Cuchulain and Eithne Inguba, Cuchulain's mistress. In the ensuing dialogue between the two we come to know that she is Emer's (Cuchulain's wife) messenger. She has Emer's message for Cuchulain forbidding him from fighting with anyone. But Eithne Inguba being entranced by Meave (referred to above) gives a different message to Cuchulain. According to this changed message Cuchulain is to go out and fight and not to linger in sloth. But Cuchulain immediately finds out the reality. Cuchulain now is not the violent man he was in his youth; he is rather a subdued man. So he does not want to take any action against her. Cuchulain, however, decides to fight. A little later Eithne Inguba to show her fidelity says :

When you are gone!
 I shall denounce myself to all your cooks,
 Scullions, armourers, bed-makers and messengers,
 Untill they hammer me with a ladle, cut me with a knife,
 put me to death.
 So that my shade can stand among the shades
 And greet your shade and prove it no traitor.¹⁶⁴

Cuchulain calls it a typical talk of a woman plotting a man's death. However, Cuchulain asks his servant to save

164. Ibid., p. 698.

Eithne Inguba by whatever means and hand her over to Connall because women have called Connall a good lover. Here the first movement of the play's action comes to an end.

The stage darkens for a moment and when it lights up again Cuchulain is shown as wounded. Here the fight or battle in which Cuchulain gets wounded is assumed during the darkened space of time of the stage. In the second movement of the action we are introduced to Aoife of At the Hawk's Well. Cuchulain also recognizes that she is the mother of his son and that he met her at the Hawk's Well under the withered tree. After this we see both Cuchulain and Aoife recalling their past life. They also recall the incident of their son's death at the hands of Cuchulain. In the meantime Aoife as asked by Cuchulain fastens his belt. After this as Aoife leaves the stage we see the Blind Man of On Baile's Strand on the stage. He introduces himself as "A blind beggar-man."¹⁶⁵ A little later he tells that he has come to cut Cuchulain's head off because while in the Meave's tent somebody promised him twelve pennies if he brought Cuchulain's head. So the Blind Man is very happy now to have found Cuchulain so easily. Cuchulain also meditates upon the shape he is likely to take in his next life :

There floats out there

The shape that I shall take when I am dead

165. Ibid., p. 701.

My soul's first shape a soft feathery shape.¹⁶⁶

Then the Blind Man's hands, as soon as he feels Cuchulain's body, go upward and reach his neck. Now he asks Cuchulain to get ready. Cuchulain also sees the head, which the Blind Man is about to cut, "about to sing."¹⁶⁷ Again the stage darkens. Now Morrighu, a war Goddess comes on the stage holding a black parallelogram, the size of a man's head which is suggestive of Cuchulain's severed head.

The climax occurs when Emer dances before the severed head of Cuchulain. She dances like the Queen of A Full Moon in March, half in love and half in loathing. It is because the death is not only the end of life but also the beginning of a new life. The play ends with the song sung by the harlot to the beggar about her union with the ancient race of Ireland's heroes :

I adore those clever eyes,
Those muscular bodies, but can get
No grip upon their things.¹⁶⁸

It is this last song that presents the moral of the play. The importance of this song can be grasped from the following account of Yeats in The Adoration of Magi where an

166. Ibid., p. 702.

167. Ibid., p. 703.

168. Ibid., p. 704.

old woman prophesies the coming of the new era and return to the world of the pagan Gods of Greece and Ireland.¹⁶⁹ We see that Cuchulain after dying has joined the company of Irish Gods who will usher in the new pagan, heroic civilization. Even when alive, Cuchulain had encouraged the Irish patriots to fight for their nation's freedom :

What stood in the post office
 With Pearce and Connally?
 Who thought Cuchulain till it seemed
 He stood where they had stood?¹⁷⁰

According to Prof. K.S. Misra "The Death of Cuchulain constitutes a fitting finale to Yeats's song and persistent pursuit of the legend of Cuchulain, the most popular of the Irish heroes."¹⁷¹ The play, we see, deals with the death of Cuchulain arranged by the war Goddess Morrighu and depicts his entire life history in a flashback, thus linking it to the other plays of Cuchulain cycle. But we see that underneath this simple legendary story of Cuchulain's death Yeats presents his own philosophy of life and death explained in A Vision. Here the play is linked with the other four plays of Cuchulain cycle. This play and the other four depict the progress of human soul as put forth in A Vision :

169. F.A.C. Wilson, W.B. Yeats and Tradition, p. 174.

170. K.S. Misra, Twentieth Century Poetic Drama : A Revaluation, p. 47.

171. W.B. Yeats, Collected Plays, pp. 704-5.

This Wheel is every completed movement of thought or life, twenty eight incarnations, a single incarnation, a single judgement or act of thought. Man seeks his opposite or the opposite of his condition, attains his object so far as it is attainable, at phase fifteen and turns to phase one again.¹⁷²

This journey of human soul is seen in the last scene of the play where after Cuchulain's death, a Goddess comes, putting an end to the dance of mourning and announcing another life. Besides we also see Cuchulain passing into the first of the three final phases of the journey of human soul -- the phase of Hunchback that ends all the passions, in the scene with Eithne Inguba. In the scene with Aoife he enters into the second phase of a Saint. Then the Blind Man's appearance shows him entering into the last phase of a fool.

As regards its technique, we see that Yeats in this play, after the brief-monologue structure of Purgatory, goes back to the Noh-pattern. Its stage is absolutely bare. This bareness is suggestive of the death of the era of heroism which is seen in the play. This decay has also been implied by the harangue with which the play starts. The play also shows Yeats's taste for the avant-gardism in the Old Man's liking and taste for abstract parallelograms.

172. W.B. Yeats, A Vision, p. 81.

But Yeats does not confine himself to the Noh-pattern only. He has used conventional devices too, which suited his purpose. Here unlike the Noh plays, dance is not followed by the folding and unfolding of cloth ceremony but by the raucous music of the ragged beggars. The refined music has been replaced here by the harsh song of the harlot.

The play is highly suggestive within a representational mould. For example, here the head of Cuchulain is suggested by a black parallelogram of the size of man's head. The play like the conventional plays has sufficient story element in it, presented here in the one-act structure of the play. Within this one-act structure the play also has something of a sub-plot in the story of the Blind Man.

The play is a strange blending of different techniques, which was the outcome of Yeats's long experiments in this field. The play also includes some elements of expressionistic technique. Its bare stage requires just a pillar-stone and good lighting control to achieve the desired effects. The play, like the conventional plays, has the pattern of irony and contrast which lead to the play's end. The play, however, finds expression through the basic elements of Yeatsian theatre such as : monologue, dialogue, myth, mask, dance and song. In the words of Andrew Parkin

the play "is a calculated piece of anti-theatre, used years before that term became fashionable. Just as the play's theme and personae oppose the age, so the use of the stage opposes the theatre of the fashionable and opulent set. The interest is focussed not on the gaudy environment of the actor, but on the personae, their movements, their words and the musical effects of the play."¹⁷³ Here Yeats aimed at producing a form variant upon the dance-play form. Here Yeats has used a technique of flashback which was popular with Ibsen in spite of Yeats's rejection of the naturalistic technique of Ibsen and Zola. Here Yeats has deliberately done away with the Noh-technique. It was because perhaps he might have realised his failure in the yoking of Noh-technique with the Irish themes.

173. Andrew Parkin, The Dramatic Imagination of W.B. Yeats, p. 165.

CHAPTER VI

C O N C L U S I O N

W.B. Yeats's position as a dramatist is characterised by a paradox. Unlike T.S. Eliot, he wanted to use drama as a medium of reaching out larger masses. This naturally would mean that the subject-matter, language and presentation of action on the stage should be conducive to the production of the effect of immediacy on the audience. Yeats admitted that the Irish Dramatic Movement, an offshoot of the general Irish Literary Movement, was bound to promote the cause of the National Movement for Independence. Hence he and the other pioneers of the Irish Dramatic Movement decided to write on themes drawn from Irish life, past and present, with an angle on the Irish nationalistic aspirations. Such plays were obviously aimed at drawing large audiences. But as Yeats went on writing plays he gradually felt tired of the large audience and pleaded in favour of a drawing-room-ful of audience. Eliot, who had begun with small audience, and later decided to cater for the theatrical needs of a larger audience, offers a striking contrast to Yeats.

Yeats was primarily a poet and his concern was almost always exclusively with poetic drama. Ireland did not have any distinct native tradition of poetic drama. Yeats being

involved in the literary currents across St. George's Channel naturally showed a keen interest in the revival of poetic drama which had been the concern of a good many playwrights in England right from the time of the Romantic Revival. The Irishness of his drama, therefore, remains more or less restricted to the source material that he selected from the legendary, historical and contemporary Ireland. So far as the use of the dramatic conventions and devices as well as the medium is concerned, he is more likely to be classed with the pioneers of the revival of poetic drama in the 20th century in England, from Stephen Phillips onwards. Like Eliot's, Yeats's concern with the revival of poetic drama was not a mere creative pass-time but a conscious artistic obsession. Hence he kept on experimenting with his dramaturgy alongside the statements of his theoretical stance throughout his dramatic career. There is a perceptible development in Yeats's theoretical stance as well as dramatic practice throughout the long years of his writings. The two aspects -- dramatic theory and practice -- kept on modifying each other in the light of their viability and practicality. We have tried to show this effect of the two aspects on each other in the analysis of the plays in the foregoing chapters.

Yeats began his dramatic career with his two Cathleen

plays which were in keeping with the manifesto of the Irish Dramatic Movement of writing plays on the glorious Irish legendary themes with a direct bearing on the contemporary national aspirations. Since message was the predominant dramatic concern of these plays the dramaturgy was along conventional lines except for characters, which were more abstract than human. The two Cathleen figures acquire symbolic signification which is an early indication of the direction which Yeats's dramaturgy was to take. The language in keeping with the dramatic intention was, of necessity, to be simple and the use of prose was resorted to especially in Cathleen-ni-Houlihan. At this stage though Yeats, in principle, was opposed to the Ibsenite and Zolaiesque type of naturalism, he used realistic themes in legendary guise. The enwrapping of the story of the sacrifice of Countess Cathleen in the legendary cover can hardly hide the ghastly reality of Ireland's economic destitution and the urgency of its immediate solution. Similarly, in Cathleen-ni-Houlihan the contemporary need of sacrificing familial and emotional obligations on the altar of national interest is only thinly covered with the legendary figure of the Old Woman symbolising Ireland.

That Yeats in his theoretical pronouncements, discussed in Chapter I and in the course of the analysis of

his plays, was opposed to photographic realism and slice-of-life representation, or even contemporary issues, is exemplified in his practice when he wrote plays like The Land of Heart's Desire, & The Shadowy Waters. The folklore myth used in The Land of Heart's Desire is not characteristically only Irish but cuts across cultural and national boundaries. The yearning for freedom and a longing for emotional life is characteristically a romantic credo and not only Irish. This element of The Land of Heart's Desire is also present in Yeats's poetry of the period of Shadowy Waters. It is needless to emphasise that the early Yeats was steeped in romanticism which is expressed in these two plays. The Shadowy Waters takes us farther from the fringe of reality represented in The Land of Heart's Desire into a remote domain of no where. Yeats's theoretical assertions about the element of remoteness in drama to counteract the drabness of realism is well illustrated in these plays. At this stage of his theorising and dramatic practice Yeats can be said to belong to the cult of Pater's aestheticism where drama was to be divorced from its moorings in worldly reality. Naturally the treatment of emotions as the main dramatic concern was of paramount importance. Any element of rounded characterisation or shapely development of plots was thus kept out of concern.

After 1904 we find a definite change in both Yeats's theory and practice. As we have pointed out earlier he himself got wearied of his aestheticism and became critical of his Shadowy Water plays which he characterised as abounding in sentimental sadness and womanish introspection. His concern now was to shape poetic drama in such a way that it ensures a future for itself, comparable to its pristine glory. For this Yeats realised that a new look at his earlier choice of subject-matter, medium and use of dramatic convention was necessary. So far as the choice of Subject-matter was concerned he asserted that the rejection of the reality of ugly life in favour of vague emotions and concern with timeless world of spirituality was not the right direction. He now believed that reality is not altogether to be rejected but is to be touched here and there and into the places we have left empty we summon up rhythm, balance and patterns. Drama thus was to be a fusion of the creative and the representational. Here as we have pointed out in the Introductory Chapter Yeats's critical stance is similar to that of Synge's expressed in the prefaces to The Tinkers' Wedding and The Playboy of the Western World. So far as the medium is concerned Yeats was in favour of verse whereas Synge had forged his own medium of poetic prose. The verse Yeats wanted to use at this stage was something akin to what

Eliot had desired, i.e., verse shorn of all embellishment, ambiguity and possessed of starkness and natural colloquial rhythm. This type of verse is used in The King's Threshold, On Baile's Strand, The Green Helmet, and Deirdre. Here Yeats, like Shakespeare, makes use of prose also for distinguishing characters and clarifying thematic concerns. Characterisation in these plays remains minimal because Yeats's concern was emotions as in On Baile's Strand and Deirdre or some idea as in The King's Threshold and The Green Helmet. So far, Yeats, though he does not state it categorically, seems not to ignore the importance of the story elements in the narrative and action of a play. One important theatrical experiment that Yeats introduced during this phase was minimising the significance attached to the stage props and scenic designs prevalent hitherto. This is because in both theory and practice he was aiming at achieving a poetic form where the supremacy of words, as in Shakespeare, is of paramount concern of the dramatist.

A number of events took place during the period Yeats had been contemplating on the suitable form that his drama would take. The most important of these was Yeats's growing realisation of the stupidity and ignorance of the Irish audience. The audience, mostly consisting of fanatic patriots and jingoists, wanted plays which might support

their superstitions, Catholic obsessions and narrow-minded nationalism. Yeats had to face the wrath of this ignorant multitude during the performance of his own Countess Cathleen where the audience misunderstood the thematic intention of the play and objected to a Christian bartering her soul to the devil with buying his favour to alleviate the sufferings of humanity. The audience obviously missed Yeats's broad humanistic concern and the idealism of supreme self-sacrifice. This was not a single event to have influenced Yeats's theoretical formulations and practice. Riots took place at the performance of Synge's The Playboy of the Western World. This story climaxes in the audience's violent opposition to O'Casey's The Plough and the Stars. Even sometimes the puritanical actors would refuse to play certain roles if they went against their narrow, Catholic inclinations. Their refusal to play Lady Gregory's Twenty Five is a case in point. Of course the external factors contributed to Yeats's experimentation with dramatic form at this stage. But his own self-examination led him to decide upon a dramatic form with greater symbolism, abstraction and intellectual appeal. We have already mentioned Yeats's disillusionment with sentimentalism and dependence on mere emotional appeal.

Yeats now realised that, if drama was to be placed at

the respectable height of a worthy art, it will have to ignore the riff-raffs of society or people with narrow sectarian and closed mentality. He, therefore, decided against formal stage with large space for the audience. He believed that a play claiming to be an artistic composition should have the resiliency to be performed anywhere, such as a drawing-room. The drawing-room concept of the stage will naturally preclude the possibility of having a large and mixed audience. Since Yeats was now moving in the élitist dramatic direction his concept of the medium-- the verse form -- also underwent a change. Instead of the colloquial dialogue of the early two plays and the langorous cadences of the Shadowy Water plays he now wanted to use stark verse with a heavy dependence upon symbols and imagery. In his search for a new form and theatrical medium his contact with Ezra Pound proved decisive. The latter introduced Yeats to the Japanese Noh form which responded to Yeats's search for a new technique in drama. What Yeats admired most in the Japanese Noh plays was their ritualistic technique and the use of various arts, - song, dance and poetry - in unison to project the deeper reality of emotion or intellect. The result of Yeats's fascination for the Japanese Noh drama was his most crucial essay on "The Tragic Theatre" and his Four Plays for Dancers. His theoretical stance and adherence to the

Japanese Noh drama elements continued until the end of his dramatic career even though during the last phase of his play-writing Yeats had minimised the use of the ritualistic and the other formal elements of the Japanese Noh drama and tried to effect a blend between this alien technique and the conventional devices especially in plot-construction and characterisation.

Yeats now believed that characterisation with psychological probing and causal developments should be the first casualty in his theoretical statement. He explicitly stated that tragedy is the drowning and breaking of the dykes that separate man from man. He goes on to elaborate his theory of the protagonist who should be conducive not only to the audience's emotional response but more than that to his intellectual excitement. Yeats, like Maeterlinck, wanted to have not the solid personalities but personae as faint as breath upon a looking glass because Yeats wanted a play that is more like a ritual than a play which leaves upon our minds an impression like that of a tapestry, where the forms only half-reveal themselves and the shadowy folds. According to Yeats, in tragedy we have only passions and motives in place of characters, for characters are the properties of comedy. Yeats prefers shadowy figures who exist in our minds not as individuated personalities but as ideas.

Yeats applied his theoretical statements to the Four Plays for Dancers. He was pleased with his success of these plays. But the sense of satisfaction was more due to the elites' admiration than that of the common reader. As our analysis of these plays has demonstrated, inspite of these plays being highly stylized and artistically cohesive they lack warmth of humanity and become too intellectual and sometimes philosophical to have a lasting impact upon the minds of the future generations. However, without recanting from his theoretical stance Yeats in the plays of the last phase of his dramatic career tried to modify his earlier theoretical stance in his actual practice of playwriting. The most important modification is that a majority of these plays paid attention to the story element. Inspite of his praise of O'Casey's plays for strong characterisation Yeats himself failed to inculcate that quality in his own plays. There is a clear disparity in Yeats's theory and practice, when he himself failed to follow the advice he gave to O'Casey while rejecting his The Silver Tassie. He told O'Casey that in drama action must burn everything else and the reality should be reduced to wallpaper. This regrettably is not followed by Yeats himself. During the last phase of his dramatic career, Yeats's dilution of the Noh-technique more than compensated for the want of other elements such as characterisation. But Yeats now became more preoccupied with philosophic concerns.

The influences of mystical thinking on him and his own philosophical system explicated in A Vision have been mentioned in the Introductory Chapter and during the analysis of the plays. Here we wish only to point out that this preoccupation with philosophy and mysticism diverted Yeats's attention from human concerns, feelings and emotions. We can assert without much fear of contradiction that if literature ignores human concerns in favour of philosophy it is bound to have no lasting future. Yeats's major drawback both in theory as well as in practice of drama has been his concern with philosophical concepts at the cost of human involvement. Then his yoking native material to an alien technique, which persisted from 1911 onwards, has perhaps been his most fatal decision. However, Yeats's greatness lies in his sincere concern with the revival of poetic drama in the 20th century. His incomplete success as a popular dramatist-- drama has always been a popular form of literature meant for public watching - does confirm one thing and that is that in order to revive poetic drama in the twentieth century new experiments are needed. Dramatists like Eliot and Christopher Fry learnt their lessons from Yeats's failure in trying to strike a balance between convention and experiment.

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